

FACT SHEET: Female Condoms

- Female condoms are sheaths, or linings, that fit loosely inside a woman's vagina
- Most common type is Female Condom Two (FC2)—made of thin, soft, synthetic rubber film, with flexible rings at both ends
- Latex female condoms are available in some countries



Primary mechanism of action

- Work by forming a barrier that keeps sperm out of the vagina, preventing pregnancy
- Also keep infectious agents in semen, on the penis, or in the vagina from infecting the other partner

Effectiveness

Protection against pregnancy:

- When used correctly with every act of sex, about 5 pregnancies per 100 women using female condoms over the first year
- As commonly used, about 21 pregnancies per 100 women using female condoms over the first year.

Protection against HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs):

- Female condoms reduce the risk of infection with STIs, including HIV, when used correctly with every act of sex.

Characteristics of female condoms

- Safe
- Women can initiate their use
- Have a soft texture that quickly conducts body heat during sex
- Provide dual protection (against STIs/HIV and pregnancy)
- Outer ring provides added sexual stimulation for some women
- Do not require provider's help
- Can be inserted ahead of time so do not interrupt sex
- Are not tight or constricting like male condoms
- Do not dull the sensation of sex like male condoms
- Do not have to be removed immediately after ejaculation
- No side effects
- Can be used as a temporary backup method of contraception
- Protect women from conditions caused by STIs (pelvic inflammatory disease, cervical cancer, infertility)
- As typically used, less effective than many other FP methods
- Require partner communication and cooperation
- May be difficult to insert
- Can make noise during sex

Side effects of female condoms: None

Who can use female condoms

- All men and women can safely use synthetic rubber female condoms.
- All men and women can safely use natural latex female condoms, except those with a severe allergy to latex (extremely rare).

How to use female condoms (FC2)

1. Use a new condom for each act of sex. Check the condom package. Do not use if torn, damaged or past the expiration date. Open the package carefully.
2. Before any physical contact, insert the condom into the vagina. It can be inserted up to eight hours before sex. Find a comfortable position for insertion—squat, raise one leg, sit, or lie down. Grasp the ring at the closed end, and squeeze it so it becomes long and narrow. With the other hand, separate the outer lips and locate the opening of the vagina. Gently insert the inner ring into the vagina as far up as it will go. Insert a finger into the condom to push it into place. (The inner ring should be pushed up just past the public bone.)
3. Ensure that the penis enters the condom and stays inside the condom.
4. To remove the condom, hold and twist outer ring to seal in fluids, and gently pull condom out of the vagina. The female condom does not need to be removed immediately after sex, but anytime before standing up, to avoid spilling semen.
5. Dispose of the used condom safely.

Tips for new users

- Suggest to a new user that she practice putting in and taking out the condom before the next time she has sex. Reassure her that correct use becomes easier with practice. A woman may need to use the female condom several times before she is comfortable with it.
- Suggest she try different positions to see which way insertion is easiest for her.
- The female condom is slippery. Some women find insertion easier if they put it in slowly, especially the first few times.
- If a client is switching from another method to the female condom, suggest that she continue with the previous method until she can use the female condom with confidence.

Provide follow-up and counseling for

- Any client concerns or questions
- Correct condom use

Dispelling myths regarding female condoms

Female condoms:

- Cannot get lost in the woman's body
- Are not difficult to use, but correct use needs to be learned
- Do not have holes that HIV can pass through
- Are used by married couples; they are not only for use outside marriage
- Do not cause illness in a woman because they prevent semen or sperm from entering her body