

Female Condoms Work

WHAT IS THE FEMALE CONDOM?

Reality female condoms are made of a thin plastic called polyurethane. This is NOT latex or rubber. The condom is placed into the woman's vagina. It is open at one end and closed at the other. Both ends have a flexible ring used to keep the condom in the vagina. The female condom comes in only one size: 15 centimeters in length and 7 centimeters wide. The flexible and removable inner ring at the closed end is inserted into the vagina as far as possible; the inner ring may be removed or left in place in the vagina; the larger outer ring remains outside the vagina. Among typical couples who initiate use of Reality condoms, about 21% will experience an accidental pregnancy in the first year. If these condoms are used consistently and correctly, about 5% will become pregnant in the course of an entire year. *Complete information about this contraceptive is available from your clinician or from the package insert.*

WHAT ARE THE ADVANTAGES?

- Female condoms give women a new option in preventing both infection (especially against herpes and HIV, since it covers more of the external genitalia) and pregnancy.
- Female condoms give women more contraceptive control and a sense of freedom. The female condom is an option for a woman who cannot get a man to use a condom.
- Women don't need to see a clinician to get it. No prescription or fitting is needed.
- The female condom can be put in up to 8 hours in advance.
- It is safe and fairly effective at preventing both pregnancy and infection.
- Your partner can insert it and make it part of lovemaking.
- Condom is pre-lubricated inside and outside and any additional lubricant may be used including oil-based lubricants inside and out and any additional lubricant may be used including oil-based lubricants since this condom is NOT made of latex.
- Polyurethane transmits heat well. This may make sex more fun.
- **The female condom can be used if either partner is allergic to latex.**
- The female condom is a good option during breast-feeding.
- Breakage is rare.

WHAT ARE THE DISADVANTAGES?

- The female condom is large and some feel it is unattractive or odd-looking. Although it looks different and may appear unusual at first, its size and shape allow it to protect a greater area. Many of the couples who have used it like the way it feels.
- Some women do not like the idea of putting fingers or a foreign object into their vagina. It can be large, bulky, and can be difficult for some women to place into vagina.
- It will not work if the man's penis enters the vagina outside of the female condom. The penis must be directed into the condom.
- It can make rustling noises prior to or during intercourse. A lubricant may decrease noises.
- The female condom is not available in as many stores as the male condom. It may be hard to find, so call the store in advance.
- Female condoms are about three times more expensive than male condoms.
- The inner ring may cause discomfort; if it does, it should be removed.
- The female condom is less effective than latex male condoms in preventing both pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections.
- They cost from \$3.30 to \$6.00 per condom in 2007. Because of the cost, some couples have been tempted to wash and reuse female condoms. Apparently, this does NOT damage the female condom, but is generally recommended that Reality Female Condoms be discarded after being used once.

WHERE DO I GET CONDOMS?

Female condoms are sold at most drugstores and at some supermarkets. Call in advance to be sure. They are sold in packs of three or six and cost \$3.30 to \$6.00 per condom. The package comes with a leaflet that explains how to use the condom. To learn more about the Reality female condom, call your clinician or call **1-800-274-6601**. Also go to www.femalehealth.com.

WHAT IF I HAVE SEX AND DON'T USE BIRTH CONTROL?

Did you know that for 120 hours after sex, you can take emergency contraceptive pills to avoid becoming pregnant? AND for 5 to 7 days after sex, you can have an IUD put in so you won't become pregnant? Emergency postcoital insertion of the Copper T 380 A IUD (ParaGard) is the most effective currently available postcoital contraceptive. Not all clinicians know about this. If you want more information or would like the phone numbers of clinicians near you that prescribe emergency birth control, call the toll-free hotline 1-(888)-NOT-2-LATE. Some of these sources of help are free. PLAN B is the emergency contraceptive pill that causes the least nausea and the least vomiting.

Source: Bridging the Gap Communications, Atlanta. Used with permission.