

FEMALE CONDOMS

What is the female condom?

A female condom is a device that is used during sexual intercourse. The female condom is a thin sheath or pouch worn internally by the receptive partner. It entirely lines the vagina and physically blocks ejaculated semen from entering that person's body and thus helps to prevent pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) including HIV. Two types of female condom are available.

The FC / FC2 female condom

The FC female condom has been available in Europe since 1992 and was approved by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in 1993. It is available in many countries, at least in limited quantities, throughout the world. This female condom carries various brand names in different countries including Reality, Femidom, Dominique, Femy, Myfemy, Protectiv' and Care.

The FC female condom is a polyurethane sheath or pouch about 17 cm (6.5 inches) in length. At each end there is a flexible ring. At the closed end of the sheath, the flexible ring is inserted into the vagina to hold the female condom in place. At the other open end of the sheath, the ring stays outside the vulva at the entrance to the vagina. This ring acts as a guide during penetration and it also stops the sheath bunching up inside the vagina.

There is silicone-based lubricant on the inside of the condom, but additional lubrication can be used. The condom does not contain spermicide.

In 2005 the makers of the FC female condom announced a new product called FC2. This has the same design as the original version but is made of nitrile, which may make it cheaper to produce. The FC2 began large-scale production in 2007.

The VA w.o.w. Condom Feminine

Like most male condoms, the VA is made of latex. When not stretched it is much shorter than the FC – around 9 cm (3.5 inches) – though it is highly elastic. It has a rounded triangular frame at the open end and a sponge inside the closed end, which helps to anchor it inside the vagina.

The VA is lubricated and does not contain spermicide. Oil-based lubricants should not be used with this female condom as they can damage latex.

How do you use the female condom?

Open the package carefully. Choose a position that is comfortable for insertion - squat, raise one leg, sit or lie down. Make sure the condom is lubricated enough.

If you are using the FC or FC2 female condom, make sure the inner ring is at the closed end of the sheath, and hold the sheath with the open end hanging down. Squeeze the inner ring with thumb and middle finger (so it becomes long and narrow), and then insert the inner ring and sheath into the vaginal opening. Gently insert the inner ring into the vagina and feel it go up. Place the index finger inside the condom and push the inner ring as far as it will go. Make sure the condom is inserted straight, and is not twisted inside the vagina. The outer ring should remain on the outside of the vagina.

To begin inserting the VA, hold the sponge and frame close together and place the closed end in front of the vagina. Use two fingers to push the closed end containing the sponge inside the vagina as far as it will go. Make sure the sponge is opened up flat once it has been inserted. The frame should remain on the outside of the vagina.

The penis should be guided into the condom in order to ensure that the penis does not slip into the vagina outside the condom. Use enough lubricant so that the condom stays in place during sex. The female condom should not be used at the same time as a male condom because the friction between the two condoms may cause the condoms to break.

If the condom slips during intercourse, or if it enters the vagina, then you should stop immediately and take the female condom out. Then insert a new one and add extra lubricant to the opening of the sheath or on the penis.

To remove the condom, twist the outer ring or frame gently and then pull the condom out keeping the sperm inside. Wrap the condom in the package or in tissue and throw it away. Do not put it into the toilet. It is generally recommended that the female condom should not be reused.

The female condom may feel unfamiliar at first. The female condom may feel different and some people find it difficult to insert. Some women find that with time and practice using the female condom becomes easier and easier.

What are the benefits?

- Opportunity for women to share the responsibility for the condoms with their partners
- A woman may be able to use the female condom if her partner refuses to use the male condom
- The female condom will protect against most STDs and pregnancy if used correctly
- The FC or FC2 female condom can be inserted up to 8 hours before intercourse so as not to interfere with the moment
- The FC and FC2 female condoms are made of polyurethane and nitrile, which are less likely to cause an allergic reaction than latex. These materials can be used with oil-based as well as water-based lubricants. No special storage requirements are needed because polyurethane and nitrile are not affected by changes in temperature and dampness. In addition, these materials are thin and conduct heat well, so sensation is preserved.

What are the disadvantages?

- The outer ring or frame is visible outside the vagina, which can make some women feel self-conscious
- The FC and FC2 female condoms can make noises during intercourse (adding more lubricant can lessen this problem)
- Some women find the female condom hard to insert and to remove
- It has a higher failure rate in preventing pregnancy than non-barrier methods such as the pill
- It is relatively expensive and relatively limited in availability in some countries
- It is recommended that the female condom be used only once

Reuse of the female condom?

It is believed that limited availability and high cost have led some women to reuse female condoms in some countries. The World Health Organisation (WHO) recommends use of a new male or female condom for every act of intercourse for those people who use condoms for pregnancy prevention and/or STD/HIV prevention.

WHO does not recommend or promote reuse of female condoms but has released a document together with guidelines and advice for programme managers who may consider reuse of FC female condoms in local settings. There are no guidelines for reusing VA and FC2 female condoms.

Using the female condom for anal sex

Some people use the female condom for anal sex. Although it can work effectively, it is difficult to use and can be painful. There is also the risk of rectal bleeding which increases the risk of contracting HIV. So it's better to use the male condom for anal sex.

Support for the female condom

WHO and UNAIDS are encouraging wider access to the female condom as a method of preventing both pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections. Many governments and non-governmental organisations provide female condoms for free or at subsidised prices as part of their HIV prevention and family planning programmes.

Worldwide use and availability

The female condom is used in public health programmes in more than 90 countries and is commercially marketed directly to consumers in ten countries. It is quite widely used in some places where it is actively promoted, such as South Africa, Zimbabwe and Brazil. However in many parts of the world it is hardly available at all.

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