Are thinner or ultra sensitive condoms as effective as regular ones? [1]

Dear Alice,

I was just wondering about the difference in effectiveness between "ultra sensitive" and regular condoms. I imagine there is a greater chance of breakage with thin condoms, right? Sorry if this is a silly question, but for some reason, I thought I heard that there wasn't a significant difference.

? Wondering

Answer

Dear Wondering,

A variety of tests are used to determine the quality and safety of condoms, including testing package integrity, lubricant quality, leakage, and stretchiness/strength. Doesn't "Professional Condom Tester" sound like a sexy job title? Unfortunately (or maybe fortunately) all the testing is done with machines. Both regular latex and ultra-thin latex condoms have been approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) [2], so they should both be safe and effective.

Furthermore, Consumer Reports also rated 23 types of latex condoms currently on the market, and all passed minimum industry standards. They found no correlation between performance and price, thickness, or the country where condoms were made. In fact, some of the ultra-sensitive condoms received top ratings for strength and reliability.

Manufacturers screen every condom as part of the manufacturing process by passing an electric current through the latex to test for tiny holes or weak spots. As such, condom breakage due to poor manufacturing quality is extremely rare. Condom failure is almost always due to user error. For tips on improving technique, check out Common reasons for condom failure [3] in Alice's Sexual and Reproductive Health archive.

Following these guidelines when using any kind of condom will help avoid blowouts or slip-ups:

- Keep the condoms out of direct sunlight and away from exposure to high temperatures.
- Check expiration dates.
- Make sure the package is sealed and has no holes - you should be able to feel an air pocket in every package.
- Open the package right before you need it, and use your fingers (not your teeth, which can tear the condom).
- Stick with water- or silicon-based lubes rather than oil-based ones.

Thanks for asking. No question is silly, and wanting to be wise about which condoms are safe makes you a better lover!

Alice!
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