Dear Alice,

I'm a Health Educator currently substitute teaching a Health class and on behalf of the class I'm asking a question so as to demonstrate how to use this website. The question is: should one closely follow the expiration dates on condoms or can one use it long past that date?

?Mr. S

Answer

Dear Mr. S,

Thanks for introducing your class to Go Ask Alice! You must be one of those cool subs that everyone likes. With regard to your question about the expiration dates printed on condoms, it's a good idea to pay close attention. The latex used to make most condoms degrades with time, so to keep them performing as desired it's best to stick with unexpired ones.

When stored in a cool, dry place condoms without spermicide are generally good for around five years from the time they are manufactured. Condoms with spermicide last about two years. Usually the expiration dates are printed on the back (for example EXP: 02/2012). It is not advisable to use a condom after the expiration date. Heat, sun, moisture, and fluorescent light can all cause damage to packaged latex condoms, as can hauling them around in your pocket, wallet, or purse. People should store them thoughtfully and may want to choose an appropriate place near to where they would use them.

It's also important to check that the package is sealed before opening it ? each package should feel like a pillow of air is sealed inside. Last, but not least, you might want to inspect your latex companion for signs of brittleness, dryness or wear before slipping it on a penis, sex toy, fingers, etc. The same goes if it will be cut open to create a latex dam. If you have any doubts, start with a fresh one. Condoms are inexpensive compared with the cost of a sexually transmitted infection or an unplanned pregnancy, so there's no need to be sparing.

Best of luck to you and your class,