How to use a condom properly — Avoid breakage and slippage! [1]

Dear Alice,

Here’s my query. I recently started having sex, and we are committed to using condoms. What is the "right" way to use a condom? I know how to put them on and take them off. But I’m petrified about having it break or come off. Also, someone told me that I should pull out immediately after I ejaculate. Is this true? This has happened before, but I have "stayed in" because I wanted my partner to have an orgasm. Is it really important to withdraw immediately after ejaculation?

Thanks for all your help,
Having fun and being safe

Answer

Dear Having fun and being safe,

It’s great to hear that you're fully committed to using condoms with your partner. Condoms that are used consistently and correctly are effective in reducing the risk of unwanted pregnancy and transmitting sexually transmitted infections (STIs) [2], including HIV. Whether the condom is being used for oral, anal, or vaginal sex, there are some key steps to using an external (male) condom correctly (the steps to using an internal (female) condom correctly are a bit different; you can check out What is a female (internal) condom? [3] for more information). Regarding when to pull out, doing so while still erect (even after ejaculation) can help ensure the condom stays in place and that none of its contents spill. To avoid any mishaps, such as breaking or slipping, keep on reading!

Before you put an external condom on (and after all parties have mutually consented to getting it on):

1. Check the expiration date on the condom; be sure that the condom has been stored in a cool, dry place away from direct sunlight.
2. Check the air bubble; press on the package — does the air stay in the package?
3. Tear the condom package carefully — without using your teeth, scissors, or any other sharp objects — to open.
4. If the condom looks damaged, discolored, or brittle, don’t use it and get a new one.
5. Add a drop of lube inside the condom for extra pleasure (if you’re into that).

To put an external condom on:

1. Ensure that the condom is facing the right side up so that it looks like a small hat with a rolled brim. It will be difficult to roll the condom down the penis if it’s placed on the wrong side. If this happens, toss out that condom and get a new one.
2. With one hand, pinch the tip of the condom to leave room for the ejaculate.
3. With the other hand, place the condom on the erect penis or object and roll it down to the base.
4. Continue using this hand to guide any air bubbles out of the condom.
5. Add lube to the outside of the condom to avoid excess friction that may cause breakage.

After the action (ejaculation):

1. Hold the base of the condom as you or your partner pulls out to avoid slippage.
2. Remove the condom and throw away in the trash, not the toilet.

More of a visual learner? You may want to check out Planned Parenthood’s What is a Condom and How is it Used video [4] for a tutorial. To more specifically address your question about taking the condom off: for many folks, an erection is lost quickly after ejaculating. As a result, the condom's fit gets a bit more loose and ejaculate can leak out of the sides. It’s also possible that the condom can more easily slip off during this time — thereby increasing the risk of pregnancy or STI transmission in either situation. So, what you heard was correct: pulling out while the penis is still erect just after ejaculation is recommended.

Lastly, as for your concern about your partner's pleasure, you could hold the rim of the condom against the base of your penis to secure it in place after ejaculation has occurred if you’re both still into the action. You might also consider having a chat about other ways they could achieve orgasm or, because an orgasm doesn’t always have to be the end-all of a sexual experience, you could take a sex break after you ejaculate and commence with other pleasurable activities with your partner. If this starts to get your collective motors runnin' once again, check in with your partner to see if they’re into it and grab a new condom (they aren’t reusable) before returning to penetrative sex.

If you're looking for more information to satisfy your condom queries, you can take a gander at the related Q&As and the Condoms [5] category in the Go Ask Alice! Sexual and Reproductive Health [6] archives.

Alice!
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