Dear Alice,

I care for my girlfriend, whom I have been seeing for a few months now. I have no problem maintaining an erection when she performs oral sex on me. In fact I can climax twice in a relatively short time. We have, however, been unable to actually engage in intercourse, since when we go to put on the condom, I lose my erection. I'm not really having too much of a problem getting erect (i.e.-- I get an erection, and may lose it early on, but I am able to get and maintain another one for oral sex). What could be the problem? Stress? A lack of physical attraction? I will be grateful for any answer you can provide me.

Concerned

Answer

Dear Concerned,

It sounds like you and your girlfriend share lots of sexual chemistry, especially when it comes to oral play. The fact that you’re able to orgasm twice in a relatively short time with her suggests that excessive stress or lack of physical attraction is not causing you to lose your erection. There are many other possible explanations behind erection loss — and by the way, your experience is very common. Around 52 percent of men report losing an erection before or while putting a condom on or after inserting into the vagina while wearing a condom. Indeed, almost all men experience erection loss at some stage in their lives. Consider the following:

- Is it a matter of maintaining stimulation? Halting oral stimulation to put a condom on before switching to penetrative intercourse may result in a loss of erection due to abrupt lack of sensation. A simple solution: ask your girlfriend to keep stimulating you (or, stimulate yourself) while you apply the condom. Continuing stimulation during condom application can help you stay hard while suiting up for intercourse.

- Are you using condoms that fit properly? Wearing condoms that are too big or small may contribute to erection loss. Do you feel sexy in a pair of pants that are too tight or too loose? Nah, not really — and your penis reacts the same way to ill-fitting condoms.
Condoms of all different sizes and textures are available!

- Is the condom dulling penile sensation? Nowadays, condoms are thinner and less noticeable than ever. However, your penis may react more strongly to unprotected oral stimulation than protected vaginal stimulation, as stimulation may be reduced by the layer of latex between your penis and your girlfriend’s vagina. Try using condoms during oral sex to grow accustomed to the sensation of wearing a condom during intercourse. You can also use lubricant inside and outside of the condom to maximize sensation.
- Are condoms your only form of contraception? You may be feeling anxious about unplanned pregnancy in the case of condom failure, which can definitely kill the mood. Consider talking to your girlfriend about using an additional form of contraception, such as the pill or an IUD, to calm your nerves. You and your girlfriend can get screened for STI's at your health care provider’s office, Planned Parenthood, or contact your local health department to find out about more options. If you both get the go-ahead from your doctors, you might consider going condom-free in favor of other forms of contraception. This, of course, should be a well-planned and mutual decision.
- Erection loss is correlated with many psychological conditions, particularly anxiety and depression. In fact, some medications used to treat anxiety and depression can reduce a person’s sex drive. Feel free to make an appointment with a counselor to delve deeper into any psychological concerns that are leading to erection loss.

Remember, your girlfriend cares for you whether or not you have an erection, and wants to be with you because of who you are, not the strength of your erection. Sex takes many shapes and forms, and intercourse doesn’t have to be the main event. As long as you and your girlfriend are satisfied, consider your problem solved. Good luck!

Alice!

Category:
Sexual & Reproductive Health [2]
Sexual Questions [3]
About Sexual Difficulties [4]

Related questions

Condom sizes... how do I know what fits? [5]
Condoms too small? [8]
Keeping the flow with a condom [7]

Resources

Medical Services (Morningside) [8]
Counseling and Psychological Services (CPS) (Morningside) [9]
Gay Health Advocacy Project (GHAP) (Morningside) [10]
Medical Services (CUIMC) [11]
Mental Health Services (CUIMC) [12]

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