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## Are two condoms better than one? <sup>[1]</sup>

Dear Alice,

My boyfriend recently suggested that we use two condoms at once while having sex because it would decrease my chances of becoming pregnant. How reliable is this and why haven't I heard about this before? We've been using a single condom. Also, which is the best spermicide that can also act as a lubricant?

Sincerely,  
Cautious

### Answer

Dear Cautious,

Double your pleasure, double your fun? Well, not in this case. Using two male condoms at the same time isn't recommended for pregnancy prevention or as a safer sex <sup>[2]</sup> method. In fact, "double-bagging" as it is sometimes called, can increase the friction between the condoms during intercourse, making them more likely to rip or tear. This could be why you haven't heard of using two condoms at once before — because it is, in fact, counterproductive. The same goes for using a male condom and female condom <sup>[3]</sup> at the same time.

It may be reassuring to know that, even on their own, single condoms are highly reliable in preventing not only pregnancies but STIs as well. Research has shown that only two out of every 100 couples who use condoms correctly and consistently for one year will have an unintended pregnancy, giving condoms a 98 percent effectiveness rate. It's important to note that, when condoms do fail, it is most often a result of human error, mistakes that people make, rather than defects in the condoms themselves. When used incorrectly (e.g., using more than one condom at a time, not putting the condom on properly, reusing a condom, etc.) the effectiveness of condoms drops substantially. Planned Parenthood also has a great video on how to put on a condom <sup>[4]</sup> which you and your boyfriend may find helpful. Check it out!

Other effective ways to decrease the likelihood of a pregnancy include using a "back-up method" of contraception in addition to condoms, such as a spermicide like you mention in your question. Other options include using condoms with a diaphragm, birth control pill, or another hormonal

method, such as the contraceptive ring or patch. There are a lot of options and each person is unique in what works for them. Check out [Bedsider, a birth control support network](#) [5] filled with helpful information, videos from real women, and this handy [side-by-side comparison of birth control methods](#) [6].

In terms of which spermicidal lubricant is the “best” — that’s something you (and your partner) can only figure out by trial and error. Some people find spermicides irritating to their skin. Nonoxynol-9 is the most commonly used spermicide in the U.S. and, if used too frequently or if the user experiences irritation, tissues can become inflamed which can increase the risk of HIV or other STI transmission.

It’s good to remember that spermicides only help to protect against pregnancy and are not effective at preventing the transmission of STIs. In terms of effectiveness at preventing pregnancy, spermicides (if used without another birth control method) are less effective than condoms. If folks always use spermicides as directed, 15 out of 100 will become pregnant each year. Spermicide will be more effective in preventing pregnancy if used in combination with a female or male condom. Also, remember that when choosing a lube to use in combination with condoms (regardless of whether the lube contains spermicide or not), pick a water soluble type, not oil-based. Oil-based lubricants will deteriorate the latex in condoms.

Have fun and stay safe!

Alice!

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