



HEALTH UPDATE

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CONDOMS, FOAM and other VAGINAL SPERMICIDES

Condoms:

The condom, a sheath worn on the erect penis during sexual intercourse, is a widely used mechanical barrier contraceptive. The condom is one of the oldest methods of birth control. Condoms are available over the counter as a non-prescription product. Theoretically, condoms can be 95-97% effective and for many couples they are this effective. However, in actual use they are probably about 90% effective. Many failures are "user failures" rather than "method failures." It is probable that inconsistent and improper use lead to lower effectiveness.

The condom should be used throughout sexual intercourse. It should be put on a dry, erect penis before any vaginal penetration occurs. Place the condom carefully over the tip of the penis and unroll completely, leaving a little space between the tip of the condom and the end of the penis (about half an inch of empty space). Pulling the condom on too tightly may result in tearing during intercourse. Sometimes it is necessary to use extra lubrication if a non-lubricated condom is used, especially if the vagina seems relatively dry. Good lubricants are contraceptive foam, jelly or cream. Vaseline or any kind of petroleum jelly or oil should not be used since the lubricants destroy rubber. Condoms are also available in pre-lubricated form, and these are highly recommended.

As soon as possible after ejaculation, the penis should be withdrawn from the vagina, holding the open end of the condom carefully against the penis to avoid spilling sperm into the vagina. If the condom slips off the penis before withdrawal, it should be removed from the vagina immediately with the open end held tightly closed. Condoms should never be re-used.

Foam:

Vaginal contraceptive foam is a sperm-killing substance that, when placed into the vagina, acts as a chemical barrier to sperm. Foam is available in various kinds of containers and these come with an applicator. Before filling the applicator, be sure to shake the container vigorously. To use foam, fill the applicator and insert it deep into the vagina; by pushing the plunger on the applicator, the foam is released into the vagina. For maximum protection, foam should be applied just before intercourse, preferably no more than one hour prior to intercourse. The application should be repeated if it has been longer than an hour and before each additional act or intercourse. Keep a spare container of foam on hand. With many brands there is no way of telling when you are about to run out. Also, be aware of the expiration date on the bottom of the container.

Contraceptive foam is an over-the-counter non-prescription product. The side effects are very rare, although some women are allergic or sensitive to one or more types of foam. If irritation occurs, try switching to another brand. Vaginal contraceptives cannot cause cancer or any other known disease, and it is believed that, because of their chemical composition, foams offer some protection against transmission of certain sexually transmitted diseases and vaginal infections.

Spermicidal suppositories:

These act as chemical barriers to sperm. The suppositories must be inserted fifteen to twenty minutes before intercourse, to allow time for them to dissolve, and no more than one hour before intercourse takes place. It is felt that better protection is to be had by using contraceptive foam for the following reasons: there are fewer reported side effects (burning, fizzing and a sensation of heat have all be reported by suppository users); it

can be inserted immediately prior to intercourse without a waiting period; and it tends to disperse more acceptably than do the dissolved suppositories.

Spermicidal creams and jellies:

A number of creams and gels with spermicidal effects are on the market. Generally speaking these are primarily for use with the diaphragm, although some are sold as a single-use applicator. These are considered slightly less effective than foam or suppositories. Directions for using these contraceptives are the same as for vaginal foam.

Remember:

Vaginal spermicidal contraceptives used alone have a relatively high failure rate and therefore should be used in conjunction with a condom. The combination of vaginal spermicides and condoms makes a very effective method of birth control, and these are available over the counter in drug stores.

Douching is not recommended, but if you wish to douche, wait at least six hours after your last act of intercourse.

All of the above contraceptives should be kept away from extreme temperatures, which might alter their effectiveness.