



# Safer Sex Choices

Think about it.

Talk about it.

Protect yourself  
and your partner.

Having sexual relationships is natural and healthy. To keep sex healthy, it's important to practice "safer sex."

The goal of safer sex is to keep blood, semen, or vaginal fluid from getting into your body during sex. This can help prevent HIV and some other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). Knowing how you can get an STD and how you can protect yourself can help you make choices that are best for you and your partner. Many birth control methods such as the pill, the ring, and the patch do not protect you from STDs, so it's important to know which methods do provide that protection.

## What safer sex choices can I make?

### Condoms

Condoms are made of thin latex rubber and cover the penis when it gets hard. They keep semen out of the mouth, vagina, and anus during sex.

There are several different kinds of condoms:

- *Latex* (rubber) is the most available and effective. It can prevent pregnancy and can protect you from HIV and most STDs.

- *Natural skin* condoms can prevent pregnancy but are not effective in preventing the transmission of HIV or STDs.
- *Polyurethane condoms* are made of a plastic and may be a good choice if you are allergic to latex. They protect you from HIV and STDs and can be used for oral, vaginal, and anal sex.
- *Flavored condoms* can be used for oral, vaginal, and anal sex. But some brands can be irritating and lead to vaginal infections.
- *Novelty condoms* are often found in sex shops and usually say "for novelty use only." They are for humor only, and are not meant for use during sex.

Condoms are sold in Kaiser Permanente pharmacies, as well as drugstores and supermarkets. Condoms are sometimes available from vending machines in public restrooms. Local health departments or Planned Parenthood clinics often have condoms for free or sold at a discount.

### Female condom

The female, or "insertive" condom, is made of polyurethane. It is the length of a regular condom, but wider. A plastic ring at the closed end keeps the condom fixed within the vagina during vaginal sex. A female condom can also be used for protection from STDs for anal sex, though it is important not to reuse the same female condom that has been used for vaginal sex – always get a new female condom for anal sex. A larger ring at the open end stays outside the vagina or anus, spreading over the outside of the genital area.

Insertive condoms are sold under the name "FC." You can find them at some Kaiser Permanente pharmacies, local drugstores, some supermarkets, and online.

### Lubricants

Lubricants are liquids and gels that let the penis slide in and out of the vagina or anus more easily. Water-based lubricants such as Aqua Lube, Probe, K-Y Liquid, and Astroglide help to keep condoms from breaking and can make sex more enjoyable. These lubricants are sold in drugstores and supermarkets. Some Kaiser Permanente pharmacies also sell them. Only water-based lubricants should be used for sex. Oil-based products, such as Vaseline, baby oil, and vegetable oil are not a good choice because they can cause latex condoms to break.

### Spermicides

Spermicides are chemicals that kill sperm. Nonoxynol-9 is the most common type of spermicide and is found in spermicidal foams, jellies, creams, suppositories, and some lubricated condoms. Spermicides do not protect against HIV and STDs. In fact, people who are sensitive to nonoxynol-9 can have vaginal, penile, or anal irritation after using them. When these areas are irritated, the risk of spreading HIV and other STDs may increase.

### Oral dams

Oral dams are thin squares of latex used for protection during oral sex. They can help prevent HIV, other



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STDs, and intestinal diseases during mouth-to-vagina or mouth-to-anus sex. Dams can be difficult to find, but you can often find them in condom stores or sexually-oriented stores.

Kitchen plastic wrap can also be used as a dam during oral sex, if used correctly. Make sure to use a piece that is large enough to fit over the anus or vagina.

## Intimacy without having sex

Not having sex (abstinence) is another way to prevent STDs. There are many ways you can enjoy being intimate without having sex, such as kissing, touching, massage, or watching each other masturbate.

*Be creative while being intimate!*

## What are STDs?

STDs are infections that are spread from person to person during sexual contact. Some common STDs are chlamydia, gonorrhea, herpes, and hepatitis B. Some STDs are passed by skin-to-skin contact while others are passed through the exchange of body fluids (semen, vaginal fluids, and blood).

Some symptoms of STDs may include:

- bumps or sores
- pain when urinating (peeing)
- unusual discharge from the penis, vagina, or anus

Many STDs do not cause any symptoms at all. Even if you have no symptoms, you may still be infected and can pass the disease on to another person.

If you are a sexually active woman who is 24 or younger, it is important that you get tested for chlamydia every year, whether you have symptoms or not.

## Are there treatments for STDs?

Some STDs are curable with medicine. Other STDs cannot be cured, but do have treatments to control them.

## What if I'm under 18?

If you are between the ages of 12 and 18, you can be treated for sexually transmitted diseases or obtain birth control in California and some other states without your parents' permission. California state law requires that Kaiser Permanente must protect your privacy.

## Should I get tested for STDs?



Even if you do not have any symptoms, you can get confidential HIV and STD tests at Kaiser Permanente. This means that your test results will not be shared with anyone without your signed authorization unless required by law. Also, many local health clinics provide free testing. You can call 1-800-367-AIDS for the nearest HIV testing site in your community. You may especially want to get tested if you have had oral, vaginal, or anal sex without a condom. If you think that you may have been exposed to an STD, even if you don't have any symptoms, talk to your doctor or nurse practitioner right away.

## How can I talk to my partner about safer sex?

- Be clear about what you will and won't do.
- Be direct about what you need and expect.
- Tell your partner how important communication is to you.

*Talk to friends who practice safer sex and find out what works for them.*

## How to use a condom

1. When the penis is hard, squeeze the tip of the rolled-up condom, and place it on the head of the penis. 
2. Hold the tip and press the air out as you unroll the condom completely. (Air bubbles can break condoms.) 
3. Use water-based lubrication (see "Lubricants" on the other side).
4. After ejaculation ("cumming"), hold the base of the condom, and pull out while the penis is still hard. Move away from your partner to remove the condom in case semen spills out of the condom. Never reuse a condom.

## Additional resources

- National STD Hotline 1-800-227-8922
- Centers for Disease Control Contact Center 1-800-232-4636
- Coalition for Positive Sexuality [positive.org](http://positive.org)
- Planned Parenthood [plannedparenthood.org](http://plannedparenthood.org)
- Connect to our Web site at [kp.org](http://kp.org) to access health and drug encyclopedias, interactive programs, health classes, and more.
- Contact your local Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center or Department for health information, programs, and other resources.

This information is not intended to diagnose or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other health care professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor. If you have questions or need more information about your medication, please speak to your pharmacist. Kaiser Permanente does not endorse the medications or products mentioned. Any trade names listed are for easy identification only.