



Condoms

– a user's guide

RFSU, the Swedish Association for Sexuality Education, is a politically and religiously independent organization dedicated to promoting an unprejudiced and open-minded attitude to sex and relationship issues. RFSU is founded on a firm belief that relationships and sex are central to the individual and to society. RFSU's activities are designed to inform, educate and shape opinion in Sweden and abroad. RFSU owns a company that sells condoms, the profits of which go towards our information activities.

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Ten penis facts with implications for condom use

Size may indeed matter, at least when it comes to using a condom. When youths and men say that they find condoms too small, this is often dismissed as typical male boasting. And sometimes it is. Youths in particular like to joke about penis size. But the question should be taken seriously. It is true that it would be hard to find a penis so big that it wouldn't fit in a condom, since condoms are so elastic.

However, the reverse is also true: a condom can be or may feel too small or narrow. But length is rarely the problem; rather, it is the girth or shape

of the penis or the size of the glans. The ten facts presented here apply regardless of whether your partner is female or male.

FACT 1: Length

A condom is generally around 18 cm long. Few erect penises are longer than that. According to surveys, 75 per cent of males have erections measuring between 12 and 18 cm, while 95 per cent of males fall within the 9–22 cm range. The average length seems to be 13–15 cm.

If the erect penis is longer than the condom, this is generally not a problem. It doesn't matter if the condom doesn't reach all the way to the base of

the penis. The only risk is that the condom may slide up the shaft a little during intercourse and, in the worst cases, slide off completely. This is more likely if the penis is fairly narrow and the condom doesn't sit snugly. You should take care that this doesn't happen.

On the other hand, things can be a little tricky if you have a short penis. Some men find it uncomfortable if the condom wrinkles up; they feel as if they are wearing a crackly bag rather than a snug-fitting condom. This is rather a turn-off. One way around this problem is to pull the condom over your balls too, so that it is anchored in place. It takes a little practice to get this right, since the

testicles slide around inside the scrotum and getting them into the condom may be awkward. It is therefore a good idea to try it out when you are masturbating. How easy you find it depends too, of course, on how big and how sensitive your balls are. If they are big, it may be hard to pull the condom all the way over them. In this case, you could try a larger condom: one that is slightly longer and wider than regular condoms. For most men, any condom will do the trick, but for this purpose you should avoid using thinner condoms, which tear more easily if you scratch them with your fingernails – easily done when you are stretching the condom like this.

FACT 2: Shape

Men with a cone-shaped penis – thicker at the base and narrower at the tip – may find that condoms are prone to slide off. Like men with a short penis, they can solve this problem by pulling the condom over their balls – see “Fact 1: Length” and “Fact 8: Balls”. They can also try using condoms that are slightly smaller in width (circumference) and a little tighter, if available.

Another way of keeping the condom in place is to slide a cock ring onto your penis after slipping on the condom. Rings are available in rubber, leather, silicone and steel, and there are also rings with a Velcro fastening, rather like a belt. Silicone rings

are elastic. Some men find that a cock ring enhances their pleasure. Rings are also used to maintain an erection or to make it harder, since they reduce the outflow of blood from the penis. Men with spinal injuries often use a cock ring. Cock rings are available from RFSU's online store (www.rfsu.com) and in sex shops.

Please note that if the cock ring is really tight around your penis, effectively stopping the blood flow, you should not wear the ring for more than 20 minutes, or it may cause tissue damage.

Some men have a penis that is slightly curved or more visibly bent upward, downward or to one

side. This makes no difference to condom use. However, if your penis is angled downward, you may find putting on the condom a little awkward, since you have to start unrolling it from below instead of from above. This means the penis can easily slip away when you try to unroll the condom, but usually all it takes is a little practice.

FACT 3: Large glans

Men with a large glans sometimes have difficulty putting on a condom, because the rubber ring on the condom is just too small to pull over the glans. In this case, it may help if you unroll the condom a couple of turns (but no more), insert your fingers and stretch the rubber ring, hold it in the stretched

position, and then pull the condom over the glans, rather like pulling on a hat. After this, unroll the condom down the shaft as usual. Take care when inserting your fingers into the condom to make sure your nails don't damage it.

FACT 4: Girth

Circumference is a more technical term for girth. The circumference of an erect penis is generally 8–12 cm, with an average of 10 cm. When the penis is flaccid, its circumference is usually 6–10 cm, with an average of 8 cm. The circumference is measured with a tape measure around the base of the penis. Girth-wise, too, any condom will fit. Condoms are elastic enough to fit a thick penis.

However, some men find the fit too tight and experience an uncomfortable or even painful pressing sensation. You can alleviate this by putting a few drops of lubricant on the condom before putting it on, so that your penis slides in easily. But be careful: if you use too much lubricant, there is a risk the condom could slide off. A cock ring can help in this case – see “Fact 2: Shape”. Condoms with a larger circumference are often available. In Sweden, this type of condom is called Grande.

FACT 5: Erection – hardness varies

As most people know, an erection is necessary before you can put on a condom. So there is really not much more to be said about that. But it's an-

other story if you don't have a hard-on.

Most youths and men have experienced the situation where they lose their erection during the process of taking out, opening and putting on a condom. This may be because they are nervous about interrupting the proceedings, or because they have suddenly been diverted from the exciting sexual experience to deal with a practical detail: putting on the condom.

The now very tangible focus on the male genitals may also be stressful. The erection – with the accompanying pleasure and arousal – is so obvious and cannot be concealed or disguised as intimacy

or romance. When your erection is so evident, you may feel naked in an emotional sense as well. For some men, especially younger ones, this obvious pleasure or arousal may be embarrassing.

Performance anxiety may also cause an erection to subside. It is fine while you are kissing and petting, but when your clothes come off, or your partner's hands grope your trousers or stroke your penis, the desire for sex may suddenly be transformed into a requirement to perform successful intercourse – and so your penis goes limp.

Sometimes the erection subsides so much that it is difficult or impossible to put on the condom or

have intercourse, especially anal sex. This has happened to most youths and men on occasion. There is not much you can do other than continue with other activities like petting, kissing and caressing other body parts until you become hard again.

The more you can associate condoms with pleasure, the easier it is likely to be to use them. One way of encouraging condom use is for the man to let himself be a “sex object”, to allow himself to enjoy receiving pleasure from his partner, rather than focusing too much on full intercourse (penetration). Being aware of your own pleasure and knowing your own genitals probably makes it easier to use a condom. If you acknowledge that most youths

and men experience varying degrees of hardness during sex, you may be less nervous if your erection subsides for a while. You will know that you are likely to become hard again. If you are confident in yourself and your penis, and not ashamed of your own pleasure, it is easier to put on a condom – with the obvious focus on the penis that this entails. Although being with a partner is a different situation, it is a good idea to practise putting on a condom when you are masturbating.

FACT 6: The foreskin

When using a condom, you should retract your foreskin before unrolling the condom completely (once you have unrolled the condom a little, pull

your foreskin back up slightly). If your foreskin is tight, it may be difficult to retract. This may not be a problem if you are having sex without a condom, but it makes putting on a condom tricky. If the foreskin is not retracted, there is more friction on the condom, which increases the risk of its tearing or sliding off. If your foreskin is too tight, there is something you can do about it.

A slightly tight foreskin can sometimes be “trained” by pulling it gently back and forth over the glans for a while, which stretches the foreskin. If this doesn't work or is painful, the problem can be solved with cortisone cream (which you apply to your foreskin) or a simple operation. Contact your

local health centre or youth clinic to determine the most appropriate treatment. If you are under 15, it may be worth waiting, since minor constrictions may disappear during puberty.

If you have been circumcised or don't have a foreskin, this usually has no notable effect on condom use. However, some men with no foreskin find that the glans becomes too dry when they use a condom. In this case, it is a good idea to put a drop of lubricant on your glans before you put the condom on, which will reduce friction. Too much lubricant, though, can cause the condom to slide off, so you need to be careful.

FACT 7: Sensitivity

Some men find using a condom painful. In some cases, as mentioned above, this is due to girth. However, it could also be because they are extremely sensitive to touch and find that condoms grip too tightly. For some men, it helps in these circumstances to use a little lubricant, so that the condom moves very slightly during intercourse.

FACT 8: The balls

The balls are sensitive to touch – more so for some men than for others. Many men like the feeling of wearing a condom over their balls and find that it enhances their pleasure. When you have slipped the condom over your

penis, continue pulling it over your balls. You should give the latex ring on the condom a gentle tug (with your fingers inside and your thumb outside) to stretch the condom to enclose your balls. This takes a bit of practice, for instance during masturbation. There is an increased risk of the condom splitting, either because you stretch it too quickly and abruptly or because you tear it with your fingernails. So it's a good idea to have a couple of spare condoms handy if you are planning to pull the condom over your balls.

FACT 9: Sharp hairs

In a few rare cases, pubic hair can cause a condom to split. Pubic hairs are sharper than other hairs. If they end up inside the condom, or more especially outside the condom but inside your partner's vagina or anus, there is a risk that they will scratch the condom so much that it tears. Simply cutting your pubic hair a little shorter will avoid this problem.

If you have shaved your public hair recently, there is a slight risk of “three-day stubble” damaging the condom, but it depends on your hair type. This can occur with both a shaved penis shaft (if you have hair growth there) and a shaved pussy. Stubble doesn't usually affect condom use, but you

should consider the possibility if you find that the condom often splits during intercourse.

FACT 10: Latex allergies

Some men are allergic to the latex rubber used to make most condoms. Latex allergies are more common among people with disabilities than in the population as a whole. Plastic condoms are available instead, but these are more expensive, less elastic and less snug-fitting than latex. On the upside, they are stronger and conduct heat better.

LUBRICANT

Many people find that lubricant adds to the fun and enjoyment of sex. Lubricant reduces friction

and makes intercourse smoother and easier. For the same reason, some men may use lubricant when masturbating. Circumcised men in particular, who have no foreskin to pull back and forth over the glans, often find that a little lubricant makes masturbation more pleasurable and avoids making the glans too dry.

The same applies to vaginal sex, depending on how much natural lubrication the woman produces (i.e. how wet she becomes). However, some people find that too much lubricant eliminates sensation – it makes intercourse just too easy, so they barely feel anything. Friction is what makes it enjoyable and produces sensation.

When masturbating, you can use practically anything as a lubricant, so long as it is slippery and feels good. Skin cream, olive oil, Vaseline, bath oil ... whatever you like. However, you can't do this when using a condom. Oil destroys the rubber – and fast. The condom will split. With condoms, you should use only water or silicone-based lubricants – nothing else. Silicone is a synthetic oil, which means it displays the same properties as natural oils but, being synthetic, does not have the same destructive effect on rubber condoms.

Almost all varieties of condom sold in Sweden are lubricated. The lubricant on the condom is gene-

rally not enough for anal sex. Likewise for vaginal sex, there may be too little lubricant on the condom, and some women find it more pleasurable to use extra lubricant.

The anus does not produce any lubrication, so it is necessary to use generous amounts of lubricant for anal sex. For one thing, it may be too painful if you don't; for another, there is a greater risk of the condom splitting, since the friction will be too great without lubricant.

So, for anal sex: Lubricate both the condom-clad penis (or dildo) and the area around and a little way inside the anus. The latter is important to en-

hance the pleasure of the person being penetrated. This advice applies regardless of whether it is two men having anal sex, a woman performing anal penetration with a dildo on a man or another woman, a man having anal sex with a woman, or a person using a dildo on his/her own anus.

Lubricant is available from RFSU's online store, www.rfsu.com, and from pharmacies. The online store also sells condoms.





Using a condom

1. Break open the condom package in the centre. There is a small nick in the centre that is easy to find in the dark.
2. Unroll the condom a fraction, so that you know in which direction it unrolls.
3. You should have an erection before you start unrolling the condom on your penis. If you have a foreskin, retract it.
4. When you have unrolled the condom a little, pull your foreskin back up slightly and gently squeeze any air out of the tip of the condom. Then continue unrolling the condom all the way down to the base of your penis.
5. After intercourse, withdraw your penis before your erection subsides. Hold the latex ring to keep the condom in place as you withdraw.
6. Dispose of the used condom in a garbage bag. Don't flush it down the toilet!



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