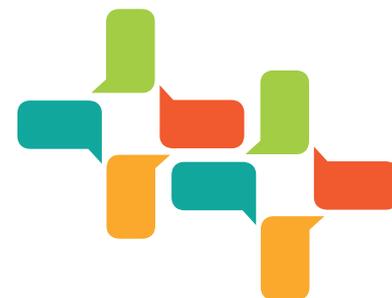


## Fact Sheet

# The female condom



Female condoms are worn during sexual intercourse as a method of contraception and also to prevent sexually transmissible infections (STIs).



### What is it?

The female condom is made from polyurethane and is inserted into the vagina before sex. It is about 15cm long and has two flexible rings, one at each end, to keep it in place in the vagina. One of the rings is closed and this end rests inside the woman's vagina. The other ring, which is open, rests outside.

### How does it work?

It covers the cervix and lines the vagina and shields the vulva (entrance to the vagina) providing a physical barrier between the penis and the vaginal walls. It also prevents the exchange of body fluids (semen and vaginal fluids). The ring outside the vagina acts as an anchor to prevent the condom from being pushed inside the vagina during sex. It is also used for removing the condom after sex. The female condom is self-lubricated but extra lubricant can be used.

It is an alternative to the male condom as a barrier method for safer sex and contraception.

### How effective is the female condom at preventing pregnancy?

When used correctly it is up to 95% effective which means that approximately 5 women out of every 100 women who use the female condom for a year will become pregnant. If not used perfectly then approximately 20 women in every 100 may fall pregnant in a year.

Female condoms can be combined with other methods of contraception including contraceptive pills, vaginal rings, contraceptive injections, implants and IUDs. This provides effective contraception and prevents STIs at the same time.

If you think the female condom hasn't worked, for example if it becomes dislodged during sex, or you forget to use it, the emergency contraceptive pill (ECP) is available from pharmacies. After unprotected sex, the ECP can be used within 120 hours to reduce the risk of unintended pregnancy (but it is more effective the sooner it is taken).

### What are the advantages of the female condom?

- It is a safe, effective and reversible method of contraception
- It can be obtained without a prescription
- It provides protection against STIs for men and women
- Unlike the diaphragm, women do not need a fitting or a medical examination before use
- It can be used with any type of lubricant e.g. oil based lubricants
- The polyurethane condom allows for heat transmission, which may make sex more enjoyable
- The external ring may stimulate the clitoris, making sex more pleasurable

### What are the disadvantages of the female condom?

- Some women find it difficult to insert and remove
- It is not as widely available as the male condom
- It can make a rustling noise during sex
- It is more expensive than the male condom
- It is not reusable (unlike the diaphragm which is reusable)

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## Who can use the female condom?

It is suitable for most people, and designed to fit all women. It can be used by those who are allergic or sensitive to latex condoms.

## How do you use the female condom?

Hold the inner ring (the closed end of the condom) and squeeze the edges of this ring together.

Insert this end as far as possible into the vagina. Upon release, the ring will open to hold the condom in place.

With your fingers inside the condom, push it up into the vagina. The outer ring should remain outside the vagina, resting against the labia.

Be sure the condom has not twisted.

Guide the penis into the vagina during sex.

To remove the condom after sex, twist the outer ring and pull the condom out. Wrap it in some tissue and dispose of the condom in a rubbish bin.

### REMEMBER:

The female condom can only be used once. It cannot be used with the male condom. If you feel that the female condom has not worked properly, or you have forgotten to use it, the Emergency Contraceptive Pill can be used to reduce the risk of pregnancy.

## Where do you get it?

You can buy female condoms from Family Planning clinics, most sexual health clinics and online. Some women's health clinics and pharmacies also stock them.

## For further information

- Contact the Family Planning NSW Talkline on 1300 658 886 or go to [www.fpnsw.org.au/talkline](http://www.fpnsw.org.au/talkline)
- NRS (for deaf) 133 677
- Or visit your nearest Family Planning clinic

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