

Condoms, Confidence and Keepin' it Real: Talking About the Tough Stuff

"Condoms are uncomfortable."

"Sex is better without a condom."

"I don't like condoms."

"Using a condom means that we don't trust each other."

Have you heard any of these lines before? Have you said any of them? Which ones ring true for you? Which ones make you think twice? While it is not realistic to think everyone having sex will use a condom every time, always using a condom is the safest thing to do. When used correctly each time someone has sex, condoms remain the most reliable barriers against HIV, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) like gonorrhea and herpes and pregnancy.

To help reach the goal of consistent condom use, each of us can look at our own behavior and attitudes about safer sex. For starters, we can think about our comfort level with condom use before we find ourselves in the heat of the moment.

Self-Talk About Sex

It isn't always easy-or comfortable-to talk about sex. It's especially hard to talk to another person about it if you haven't figured out what you want from sex. Take some time to think about these questions (and, if you'd like, write down your thoughts about them):

What does sex mean to me?

What do I want to get out of sex?

What kind of sex do I want to have?

Now, figure out how condoms fit in to your ideas about sex. Give yourself some time to consider what risks you are willing to take. Start by thinking about these questions:

Under what conditions would you consider having protected sex?

In which situations would you consider having unprotected sex?

What are the differences between the two situations?

Take some time to think about how you

would respond to a partner who does not want to use a condom.

Practice your responses by saying them out loud, to a friend or in front of a mirror. Remember that condoms offer two kinds of protection. If your partner is not concerned about the possibility of getting HIV or other STDs, he may be worried about pregnancy – and having to pay 18 years of child support.

Condom Talk With Your Partner

- Talk about using condoms when you are relaxed and not on the verge of having sex.
- Plan what you want to say in advance.
- Talk about why it is important to you to use a condom and be clear about what you will, and will not, do without a condom.

If you're concerned that your partner will become violent or decide to leave you if you ask him to use a condom, there are still things you can do to reduce your risk.

- Satisfy him with oral sex. Giving a blowjob involves less risk than having genital sex, especially if you don't swallow. If you do swallow, spit out quickly and discretely.
- Skip the negotiations and put a condom on your partner's penis as part of foreplay. Put a few drops of lube inside the condom before you put it on your partner. This should increase his sensation during sex and may make him less aware of the fact that he is wearing a condom.
- Put a condom on your partner using



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your mouth. (Non-lubricated ones taste better.) This may take some effort on your part. Try practicing on a zucchini or a cucumber, but keep in mind that the texture of a penis is very different. If you have a silicone dildo, practice on that.

Remember, each relationship and sexual situation is unique. The ideas mentioned are tools that may be helpful in certain situations, but not in others.

If You Have Sex Without a Condom

- Try inserting lube directly into your vagina to make intercourse more comfortable.
- If possible, don't let your partner ejaculate (cum) inside of you. Keeping semen outside of your vagina will greatly reduce the chance of getting infected or getting pregnant.
- Establish a good relationship with a health care provider. Go for regular screenings to get checked for STDs. **RW**

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