

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. Doing 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 decisions that are best for you and your partner.

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 and can prevent pregnancy, 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. However, 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 intended 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.

Condoms are usually sold in packages of three for \$2 to \$3. 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. This ring can be left in or removed 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." They are available at some Kaiser Permanente pharmacies, local drugstores, some supermarkets, and online.
- The insertive condom is sold in packages of three that cost between \$9 to \$12.

Lubricants

Lubricants are liquids and gels that let the penis slide in and out of the vagina or anus more easily. This keeps condoms from breaking and can make sex more enjoyable. 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 for \$7 to \$9 for a bottle or tube. They are also sold at some Kaiser Permanente pharmacies.

Only water-based lubricants should be used for sex. Oil-based products, such as Vaseline, baby oil, and vegetable oil 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 provide protection 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, risk of transmitting 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 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 adult toy 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 reduce the risk of getting 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 include: bumps or sores, pain when urinating (peeing), and unusual discharge from the penis, vagina, or anus.

Many STDs do not give 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 young woman, it is important that you get screened 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.

Should I get tested for STDs?

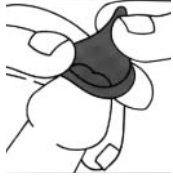

Even if you do not have any symptoms, you can get confidential HIV and STD tests at Kaiser Permanente. Also, many local health clinics provide free testing. You can call 1-800-FOR-AIDS for the nearest HIV testing site in your community. If you think that you may have been exposed to an STD, even if you 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.

Other resources

- Kaiser Permanente Healthphone
1-800-33-ASK ME
- TTY Healthphone
1-800-777-9059
- National STD Hotline
1-800-227-8922
- National AIDS Hotline
1-800-342-2437
- Kaiser Permanente's Web site
www.kp.org
- Coalition for Positive Sexuality
www.positive.org
- Planned Parenthood
www.plannedparenthood.org
- *Kaiser Permanente Healthwise Handbook*

This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other medical professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have further questions, please consult your doctor. Kaiser Permanente does not endorse any brand names; any similar products may be used.