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Sex Matters

by Dr. Sandra L. Caron, Ph.D.



This week is National Condom Week, so I'd like to focus today's column on condoms, to get you thinking about this issue. Let me start off by saying: **Vows of abstinence break far more often than condoms do.** Hav-

ing said that, I would like to point out that the simple truth is that, for sexually active couples, condoms are the best means we have of preventing HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). For a couple who is committed to having sexual intercourse and who have any concern regarding any of the STDs, latex condoms are the best means of preventing infection. Abstinence and a mutually-faithful monogamous relationship with an uninfected partner, few would argue, are even more effective. But if sexual intercourse is going to occur, condoms are the best approach to preventing infection.

For condoms to work, they must be used correctly and consistently. The following instructions will help ensure effective use:

- 1) Use latex condoms every time you have sexual intercourse; this is the key to any kind of successful contraception.
- 2) Use spermicides containing nonoxynol-9 with the condom. Foam and film are both easy to apply. Spermicide protects against pregnancy and a number of STDs.
- 3) Do not put a condomless penis into a vagina or anus. Even if a man has a great "control," there is always the possibility of pre-ejaculatory leakage.
- 4) Leave about a half-inch of space at

the condom tip and roll the condom all the way down to the base of the penis.

5) Soon after ejaculation, the penis should be withdrawn. Make sure someone holds the base of the condom firmly against the penis as it is withdrawn.

6) After use, check the condom for possible torn spots. If you are not using a spermicide (you should be), immediately apply contraceptive foam or jelly. This may reduce the risk of pregnancy or infection. If torn condoms are a persistent problem, use a water-based lubricant to reduce friction such as K-Y jelly, spermicide or saliva; they all work. Please note: Some of you will be happy to know that there is a condom made to fit a larger penis; it is called the Max X.

7) Do not re-use condoms.

8) Keep condoms in a cool, dry and convenient place.

If you and your partner are uncomfortable with condom use, consider the following:

Communication is crucial. It may seem "unromantic," but planning your contraception/STD protection strategy before you are sexually entangled is essential. Sex is too important to be left up to your genitals. Giving or getting a disease or worrying about pregnancy is about as unromantic as you can get. Explore your feelings together; share your knowledge. Consider visiting Cutler for information - together. Neither partner should be forced to use a form of birth control he or she is truly unhappy with. But the issue of protection must be dealt with, by both of you.

Don't forget your sense of humor and playfulness. Condoms can actually pro-

vide lots of laughs. Laughter and sex go well together. Fancy condoms - lubricated, ribbed, colored (have you seen the black "tuxedo condoms" for formal affairs?) are popular for their entertainment value. Let yourself be entertained.

Stand your ground. Unless you want to be pregnant and are sure your partner is free of STDs, you need protection during sex. If your partner says "no" to using a condom, you can just tell them "None of my

other partners have minded. What's wrong with you?" If your partner cares about you, they'll want to use a condom.

Sandra L. Caron is an associate professor in the department of Human Development and Family Studies. She teaches CHF 351: Human Sexuality. Questions for Dr. Caron can be sent directly to her at The Maine Campus, Chadbourne Hall. Copyright Sandra L. Caron 1996