

sextalk.

answers to your questions about sex and relationships

factoid

The word condom is thought to be named after a doctor in the time of Charles II. It is believed that he invented the device for the king to help him prevent the birth of more illegitimate children.

Q. I've been thinking about starting to have sex. I wanted to know how effective combining contraceptives such as condoms, the pill, and spermicide are in preventing pregnancy. If used properly and at once, what are the chances I will get pregnant?

A. Using all three methods correctly at the same time will give you a great deal of protection, effectively limiting the chance of pregnancy to well under 1%. Of course, both condoms and the pill are very good at preventing pregnancy on their own, but condoms also offer protection from sexually transmitted infections (STI's), making them an all-around excellent choice. Here are some effectiveness rates for the different contraceptive methods you mention:

The birth control pill, also known as "The Pill" works by inhibiting the release of the female egg. Taken correctly, it is up to 97-99.5% effective at preventing pregnancy. Forgetting to take your pill for a day, or taking it at a different time of day than usual are two factors that can reduce its effectiveness. If you think you may have trouble staying on schedule with the pill, other birth control options are available that need only be taken every few months.

Latex condoms reduce the chance of getting pregnant to between 88-98%. To work properly, they need to be undamaged, used before their expiration date and worn correctly. Condoms should be put on as soon as the penis is erect and well before any sexual contact to limit any female contact with sperm.

Spermicides, which contain agents that kill or immobilize sperm, need to be applied inside the vagina prior to every act of intercourse. Ideally, spermicides are used in conjunction with condoms since they offer minimal protection from STI's and can range in effectiveness from 74-94%. Keep in mind that some people have allergies to spermicide that can result in skin irritations.

As always, the best birth control method is the one that makes the most sense for you. These birth control options and more are available at the Campus Health Service. To schedule an appointment call 621-9202.

Have a question? Send it to sextalk@email.arizona.edu

SexTalk is written by Lee Ann Hamilton, M.A., CHES, Melissa McGee, Ph.D., MPH & David Salafsky, MPH, health educators at The University of Arizona Campus Health Service.

