

Condoms for masturbation? ^[1]

Dear Alice,

Can condoms be used for masturbation? Or is that a waste?

? Resourceful

Answer

Dear Resourceful,

The short answers to your questions are that yes, condoms can be used for masturbation, and no, it doesn't need to be a waste. Choosing to use [condoms](#) ^[2] during [masturbation](#) ^[3] might be based on several factors, including how you masturbate and what you hope to get out of the activity. For example, are you using a toy (such as a vibrator or dildo) or are you letting your fingers do the walking? Are you flying solo or do you prefer a multi-player activity? Are you looking for easy clean-up? Are you getting accustomed to how a condom feels? Ultimately, you get to choose whether using a condom is for you and if it's useful or beneficial for your particular routine.

Using condoms during solo-play may have some unexpected benefits. If you're new to using condoms during penetrative sex, getting the hang of using them while masturbating might help you feel more confident about putting them on when you choose to partner up. It may also be a strategy for trying out new [condom varieties](#) ^[4], [sizes](#) ^[5], textures, and [lubricants](#) ^[6]. Masturbating with a condom can also help some people with premature or delayed ejaculation by changing the amount of stimulation. Similarly, this may also aid in making the solo-masturbation experience a bit closer to partnered sex. It can be particularly helpful for anyone who has difficulty enjoying partnered sex with a condom as much as masturbation. And finally, some people prefer to use condoms during solo-masturbation to simply aid in keeping things tidy. While condoms would work in this respect, many find that tissues, hands, bed sheets, underwear, and so on, may be more frugal alternatives that work just as well.

For those who use toys to pleasure themselves, condoms can be useful for hygienic reasons. External condoms (also called male condoms) can be appropriate for anything that gets inserted into the body, whether your preference is for dildos, vibrators, anal beads, fingers, or other toys and body parts. It's recommended that you use a new condom anytime you are using toys or fingers in a different orifice; for example, moving toys or fingers directly from the [anus to vagina](#) ^[7] can introduce harmful bacteria into the vagina or urethra. Also, barrier methods can be especially helpful when a toy is shared between partners as it could help

prevent transmission of bodily fluids from one to another. Additionally, if you've been treated for a sexually transmitted infection (STI), a barrier method on your toy can help prevent reinfection! And, it's good to keep in mind that there may be other concerns beyond STIs as well. It's possible to come into contact with a number of skin microbes that might cause a yeast infection, a urinary tract infection (UTI), or other issues including [molluscum contagiosum](#) [8] (a viral infection that can spread to any part of the body from contact with infected skin, clothing, toys, or even towels). Even when wrapping up your toys before you play, it's still recommended to keep up on [handwashing](#) [9] ? and be sure to clean toys regularly, too (before *and* after).

For people who prefer to do the diddling without a toy, using condoms might not be necessary, unless you have an active infection that you want to keep covered. Infections of concern could include [human papillomavirus](#) [10] (HPV) and herpes as they can be transmitted through skin-to-skin contact. Avoiding contact with genital warts (typically caused by HPV) or herpes lesions until they've healed is advised. Using a barrier method during masturbation may come in handy (pun intended!) if someone is actively experiencing either. In the event you do come into contact with any sores, it's a good idea to do some thorough handwashing post-action.

Looking to partner up your play? If you choose [masturbate with a partner](#) [11] and STIs are a concern, make sure that neither you, nor your partner(s), have broken skin or cuts on your hands (where bacteria and viruses you may come in contact with have an easier way to get into the body) and that bodily fluids aren't exchanged. If you get bodily fluids on your hands, make sure to wash them before touching yourself or your partner to avoid transmission. It may also be helpful to keep in mind that barrier methods can only protect the areas they actually cover; it's more difficult for condoms to protect against infections from ulcers or sores on the thighs, buttocks, or groin area. As such, similar advice is given to masturbation amongst couples, avoiding contact until the lesions or sores have healed is wise to prevent transmission.

In any case, the choice is yours! If you want more information on masturbation, STIs, and condom use, take a gander at other Q&As in [Go Ask Alice! Sexual and Reproductive Health](#) [12] archives.

Hope this helps!

Alice!

Category:

[Sexual & Reproductive Health](#) [13]

[Condoms](#) [14]

[Masturbation](#) [15]

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[Masturbates=sexually active?](#) [17]

[Environmentally-friendly condom disposal](#) [18]

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[Alice! Health Promotion \(Morningside\)](#) [20]

[Medical Services \(Morningside\)](#) [21]

[Center for Student Wellness \(CUMC\)](#) [22]

[Medical Services \(CUMC\)](#) [23]

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Footer menu

- ▼ [Contact Alice!](#)
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Links

- [1] <http://mobile.goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/condoms-masturbation-0>
- [2] <http://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/five-kinds-condoms-guide-consumers-0>
- [3] <http://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/masturbation-healthy-0>
- [4] <http://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/time-go-condom-shopping-brands-sizes-textures-%E2%80%94-what-buy>
- [5] <http://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/condom-sizes-how-do-i-know-what-fits-0>
- [6] <http://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/what-lube>
- [7] <http://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/finger-anus-vagina-okay>
- [8] <http://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/bumps-inner-thighs-warts-molluscum>
- [9] <http://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/handwashing-dos-and-donts-0>
- [10] <http://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/clear-hpv-symptoms-clear-virus>
- [11] <http://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/mutual-masturbation-4>
- [12] <http://goaskalice.columbia.edu/category/sexual-reproductive-health>
- [13] <http://mobile.goaskalice.columbia.edu/category/sexual-reproductive-health>
- [14] <http://mobile.goaskalice.columbia.edu/category/condoms>
- [15] <http://mobile.goaskalice.columbia.edu/category/masturbation>
- [16] <http://mobile.goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/safety-tips-male-sex-toys>
- [17] <http://mobile.goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/masturbatessexually-active-0>
- [18] <http://mobile.goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/environmentally-friendly-condom-disposal>
- [19] <http://mobile.goaskalice.columbia.edu/resource/safer-sex-map-morningside-barnard>
- [20] <http://mobile.goaskalice.columbia.edu/resource/alice-health-promotion-morningside>

- [21] <http://mobile.goaskalice.columbia.edu/resource/medical-services-morningside>
- [22] <http://mobile.goaskalice.columbia.edu/resource/center-student-wellness-cumc>
- [23] <http://mobile.goaskalice.columbia.edu/resource/medical-services-cumc>