Better information about dental dams [1]

Dear Alice,

I've seen the recommendations. I've seen the suggestions for do-it-yourself workaround (cutting open a condom, plastic wrap...). What I “haven't” seen is practical usage advice? how to place the thing effectively, how to overcome the limitations of losing direct contact, how to arrange things to permit vaginal penetration with fingers while still maintaining protection and so on. Best-practice condom use isn't pluperfectly obvious either, but at the most basic level it's pretty straightforward. If you want to build acceptance for barrier use during cunnilingus, it needs to be at least as clear and/or at least as well-documented.

Answer

Dear Reader,

You’re absolutely right to point out the lack of information and discussion around the use of dental dams. It’s a shame because dental dams are excellent barriers for safer oral sex. For readers who may not be as well versed on this topic, here’s a brief rundown: Dental dams are small, square pieces of latex – the same material used in standard male condoms – that are used for cunnilingus (oral-vaginal sex) and anilingus (oral-anal sex or rimming [2]). As the name suggests, dental dams were originally created to help dentists focus on a particular part of the mouth during dental procedures. But, alas, dental dams also create an effective barrier to keep bacteria, viruses, and STIs at bay during oral sex. For example, dental dams are great at preventing accidental ingestion of fecal bacteria or parasites during anilingus, reducing the transmission risk of oral-genital herpes, HPV [3], and oral chlamydia and gonorrhea.
Now, it’s time for the nitty-gritty details. The first order of business is to squash any fears you may have about using dental dams. What better way to do this then by practicing and planning ahead. Seriously, just like when using condoms, the more familiar you become with dental dams, the better you may feel about introducing and using them during sex play. So, grab a few, open the package, and get familiar! Have a nice supply of dental dams (and condoms) available wherever you like to get down and dirty. Further, there are lots of creative ways to incorporate dental dams into sex play while maintaining an intimate atmosphere. For example, you could ask your partner to touch her or himself while you (very) slowly unwrap and apply the barrier. Another way to keep it sexy is by experimenting with different dental dam colors, sizes, and flavors.

When it comes to keeping the dam in place, try applying a water-based lubricant to the vulva or anus. This can help keep the dam secured with an added bonus of also enhancing pleasure. In terms of placement, make sure the dental dam is covering the vulva or anus, allowing for oral stimulation of these areas without transmission of bodily fluids and skin contact. Either you or your partner can use your hands to hold the dam securely in place. To prevent slippage, it’s a good idea to first wipe any lubricant off the hands and fingers before attempting to do this. Also, if you are a fan of the DIY, consider making a dental dam with secure ?handles? by cutting off the three middle fingers of a latex glove. Added bonus: Use the remaining thumb or pinkie ?handles? for penetration with the fingers or tongue! Just keep in mind that if you’re going to make your own dental dam, you should choose non-lubricated condoms that haven’t been treated with spermicide as well as powder free latex gloves ? your taste buds will thank you.

Here are some additional considerations:

- Always check your chosen barrier for holes or tears before using it. You can do this by holding it up to a light. Don’t attempt to work around any holes or tears ? it’s much safer to use a brand new barrier instead.
- Only one side of a dental dam should be used. Flipping a dental dam around to use the other side defeats the purpose of the barrier, potentially exposing the dam user to bacteria and viruses.
- Do not use one dental dam on multiple parts of the body. For example, moving the dam from the anus to the vulva can cause a urinary tract infection [4] due to the introduction of fecal bacteria to the urethra, and moving the dam from the vulva to the anus could transmit genital herpes from the labia to the anus.
- Never save a dam to reuse at a later date or time, even if you plan to use it on the same body part. Dental dams are strictly intended for one-time use.
- Dams are not intended for insertion. If you wish to use a barrier to permit vaginal or anal penetration with fingers, it’s a better idea to use a latex glove with some water-based lubricant.
- Make sure not to use oils or oil-based lubricants when using dental dams, because they can break down the latex and reduce barrier effectiveness.

Dental dams are a great addition to your safer sex repertoire. Readers ? Do you have additional advice on how to integrate dental dams into your oral sex play? If so, leave it in the comments! Cheers to dental dams!

Alice!
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