Dear Alice,

It is recommended that latex condoms not be stored/carried in a wallet or glove compartment (among other things). Are polyurethane condoms more durable under such circumstances?

In fact, here's a better question: do polyurethane condoms require different care, in storage or in use, than latex?

Answer

Dear Reader,

Your question is a great one, but unfortunately, one that doesn't have too much supporting research. The existing research on polyurethane condoms does show that they are different from latex condoms in some important ways. Polyurethane condoms:

- Provide similar rates of pregnancy prevention as latex condoms
- Are believed to provide similar protection against sexually transmitted infections (STIs)
- Are thinner, yet less stretchy, than latex condoms, possibly making them more prone to break
- Are a bit more expensive than latex male condoms
- Can be used with both oil and water-based lubricants (latex condoms cannot be used with oil-based lubricants)

While there is little published research on how to store polyurethane condoms, you might follow the same general condom care guidelines that you would for latex condoms. Both should be stored away from extreme temperatures, and not rubbed, compressed, or otherwise handled roughly. Like latex condoms, polyurethane condoms have expiration dates that indicate when they are safe to use.

Just in case you were wondering about other alternatives to male latex condoms, the female condom is another option. Made out of polyurethane, the female condom provides protection against pregnancy and STIs, and also has the advantage (like male condoms) of being a relatively inexpensive barrier method of protection. The female condom can also be used safely with oil- and water-based lubricants. For more information on the female condom, check out What is a female condom? in the Go Ask Alice! Sexual Health archive.
You've brought up a great point? more research is certainly needed on how to store and care for polyurethane condoms!

In the mean time, you can practice safer sex by using whichever condoms suit you, and your partner(s), best.

Alice!
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