Dear Alice,

I have heard that it is unsafe to keep condoms in wallets, since they can get broken or weak with all the bending the wallet does when you sit down. Is that true?

Answer
Dear Reader,

The short and sweet answer to your question is that what you've heard is true! A condom stored in a wallet may be damaged by lots of action (even when the person carrying it isn't getting any). The constant bending and friction caused by sitting and moving, as well as long exposure to your body heat, can cause a condom to deteriorate. Extreme heat or freezing cold [2] can make the condom brittle and weak (no matter if the condom is brought back to room temperature before it's used or not). Even if the packaging and the condom look fine when opened, there might still be microscopic holes and tears that make it less effective in preventing unwanted pregnancy and the transmission of sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Want to know more about conquering this condom conundrum? Read on!

For best results, store condoms in a cool, dry, dark place. It might be better to keep them in your bedside table, rather than in your back pocket. However, if you want to have condoms available while you're on the go, you could consider purchasing a small, hard case (such as a business card holder, plastic compact, etc.) to hold your condoms. Then, you can put the case in a bag or your jacket pocket, strengthening your protection from hazards like heat and punctures. Even if it has been stored in a safe way, when in doubt (e.g., condom seems sticky, brittle, or it?s past its expiration date), throw it out and get a new one!

You can reduce the chance of using a damaged condom by regularly replacing your stash of condoms and keeping an eye on the expiration date. You can also lower the risk of STIs and pregnancy by making sure it's put on properly [3]. You might also chat with your partner about other ways to reduce the risk of STIs and pregnancy. There are many birth control options that are complimentary to using a condom. For more information, check out Best contraception with a condom? [4] and other Q&As in the Contraception [5] category of the Go Ask Alice! archives.

Whether you're preparing for future action or on your way to an encounter, condoms are a trusty friend; they will help take care of you, especially if you take care of them.

Alice!
Category:
Sexual & Reproductive Health [8]
Contraception [7]
Condoms [8]
Safer Sex [9]

Related questions

Bathroom birth control: Are condoms from vending machines safe? [10]
An explanation of condom failure rates [11]
When's the right time to put on a condom? [12]
Condom broke and I'm worried about it happening again [13]

Resources

Safer Sex Map (Morningside/ Barnard) [14]
Alice! Health Promotion (Morningside) [15]
Center for Student Wellness (CUMC) [16]

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