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,

What you've heard is true: a condom stored in a wallet can be deteriorated by lots of action, even when the person carrying it isn't getting any. The constant bending of the wallet caused by sitting and walking, as well as the friction from frequently opening and closing it, can cause a condom stored inside to deteriorate. Even if the condom looks fine when you open it, there might still be microscopic holes and tears in it that make it less effective in preventing pregnancy and the transmission of sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

Extreme heat or freezing cold can also make the condom brittle and weak, even if the condom is brought back to room temperature before it's used. For best results, store condoms in a cool, dry, dark place. It's better to keep them in your nightstand than your back pocket. However, if you do want to have condoms available while you're on the go, you might consider purchasing a small, hard case (such as a business card holder, plastic compact, etc.) to carry around in a bag with you to protect your protection from hazards like heat or punctures.

Given the choice, a wise guy or gal would choose a condom that has been stored in a cool, dry place as opposed to a pocket or purse; nevertheless, a condom that has been through harsh conditions is still better than no condom at all. Just make sure the condom isn't past its expiration date and isn't sticky or discolored when you open it.

You can reduce the chance of using a damaged condom by regularly replacing the condom in your wallet, and lower the risk of STIs and pregnancy by making sure it's put on properly. (Check out An explanation of condom failure rates and Common reasons for condom failure in the Alice archives for more information.) You could also pair condoms with another form of birth control, such as the pill, or apply a spermicidal foam or jelly that does not contain Nonoxynol-9, to help decrease the risk of pregnancy and transmission of STIs.
Whether you’re getting action, or simply want to be prepared, condoms are a trusty friend; they will help take care of you, especially if you take care of them.

Alice!
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Sexual & Reproductive Health
Contraception
Condoms

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