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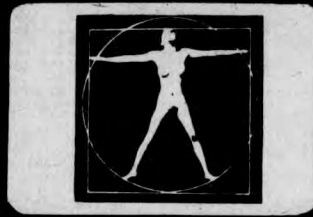
# Birth control: from pig-skins to pills

Since the introduction of the Pill and the IUD in the fifties, women have become increasingly responsible for all aspects of contraception: women choose the method; take time for office visits; pay the medical bills, and personally cope with the problems of side effects and long term medical consequences.

While it is certainly better to have contraceptive choices available, the common equating of birth control with devices used by women is unnecessarily limiting.

The current state of contraceptive technology is not so advanced and not so wonderful that we can afford to forget that older, simpler

## Harbinger's Column by Sue Kaiser



methods do work and have their advantages. Social custom also has not progressed to the point where we are always willing to plan ahead for contraception as a part of an overall awareness of our sexuality. In this context, condoms have advantages, since they require no prescription and are relatively inexpensive.

### BARRIER METHODS

Condoms are one of a group of methods, which, in family planning jargon are known as barrier methods. (The others include diaphragms and spermicidal foams

or jellies.) In use for centuries, condoms were originally made of linen or silk, and were worn for protection against disease. Sheaths made of animal intestines had been in use in the middle east for many centuries before they made it to England in the 17th century.

Dr. Condon, a Court physician for King Charles II of England developed a technique for cleaning and drying sheep intestines, which were then oiled to make them supple when used. These effectively prevented pregnancy, as well as guarding against venereal disease.

Colonel Condon, also a member of King Charles' court, popularized sheaths, and gave them his name. Whether he bestowed it willingly, or because of his frequent visits to the castle pharmacy is not recorded.

Today, the overwhelming number of condoms used are latex ones manufactured on moulds dipped in liquid rubber. Condoms are tested fairly rigidly; for pin holes (by filling with water) and for tensile strength (by filling with air). Those which satisfy government and industry regulations almost never contain pinholes or rupture during use. The pregnancy rate of condoms alone, as measured strictly in terms of method failure is quite low - less than five per cent. When used with a spermicidal agent, theoretical failure rates drop to one per cent.

### FAILURE RATE

In actual use, the failure rate of condoms varies, depending on the motivation and knowledge of the users.

When used carefully and with contraceptive foam, condoms are as effective as the birth control pill.

In order for condoms to be effective, both partners must feel the necessity of preventing an unwanted pregnancy. This means that you will use condoms every time you have intercourse, not merely every time you "plan" to have intercourse.

The second criterion for effective use is practical knowledge, i.e. try one, practice, give it a trial run. Buy a few in advance. Better to be teased for being prepared, than caught in the complex emotions and choices of an unplanned pregnancy. While it seems logical that this advice is for men, it is truly non-sexist wisdom, meant for women too.

It is perfectly reasonable for a woman to carry condoms if she is not "covered" by another contraceptive, and to ask the man to use them. With some practice, women also become adept at putting condoms on their partners.

Some drug stores carry manufacturers pamphlets on condom use, but in general they are packaged without directions. Two dimensional directions have their limitations, but these steps, combined with a few safe trials will make it easier to use condoms effectively.

1. Since sperm are often released prior to ejaculation, always put the condom on before entering the vagina. Condoms come rolled up, and should be placed at the end of an erect penis, and un-rolled on.

2. Always squeeze the tip of the condom to keep out air as you roll it on. Leave about a half inch of empty space at the tip to give the semen somewhere to go. Some brands have nipple tips to hold the ejaculate.

### BASE ROLL

3. Make sure the condom is rolled out fully to the base of the penis. If you are using a lubricated condom, go on the the next step. If not, try saliva or a sterile lubricant like K-Y jelly. Lubrication minimizes the risk of tearing, and may make insertion more comfortable for both partners. Never lubricate a condom with petroleum jelly, since it will cause the rubber to deteriorate.

4. After ejaculation, hold the rim of the condom at the base of the penis to prevent spillage. Withdraw before the penis becomes flaccid.

5. Check for holes or rips, and then roll the condom off carefully. Wipe up any ejaculate left on the penis (remember, it only takes a drop to cause pregnancy).

As well as using contraceptive foam regularly, keep some extra handy. If the condom rips or slips off, use another applicator of foam for extra protection.

6. Condoms should be used only once. They have an "ideal" shelf life of about two years, but heat tends to age them more quickly. Wallets and pant pockets are not a good place to carry them.



## CYSF

A student service

A column submitted by members of CYSF (Council of the York Student Federation). Views expressed are those of CYSF and/or individual members.

CYSF will bring the York community some lunchtime music today from noon to 2 as the band Cottonwood performs in the Bearpit.

Anyone interested in helping with the York Winter Carnival should come to a meeting in the CYSF offices tomorrow at 1. Sponsors have been found for various activities, and college participation will be an important aspect of the Carnival.

Carnival events will run the week of January 22, concluding on the Sunday of that week. Tentative events include tray competitions and inter-college cross-country and downhill competition (with the races taking place on the York Ski Club trip that week). People are the key to the Carnival's success.

**Brian Hayden**  
 Social and Cultural Affairs

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