

EQUIPMENT CHECK

Condoms needn't be mirth control

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Before you complain about condoms, count your blessings. If you'd been living a couple of thousand or even hundreds of years ago, you'd be looking at prophylactics made from goat and sheep bladders, fish intestine, muscle tissue from those (humans) you vanquished in battle and--it pains me to say--tortoise shell.

We've come a long way. Today you can buy condoms that are ribbed and studded, colored and scented, extra long, extra wide and more spacious--and friction-producing--at the tip. One innovation, however, piqued our interest.

For many men, the biggest condom issue involves deployment. A study published last year by researchers at Indiana and Emory Universities found that 22 percent of men lost their erection before they put a condom on; 20 percent lost it after donning the equipment and activity had begun. To make matters worse, 30 percent of men placed the condom upside down and then flipped it over to try again. (Next time that happens, open a new package, guys).

To simplify the process, Santa Monica-based Hot Rod Condoms has developed a condom with the Speedstrip Applicator. Place the condom on the head of its target, pull the latex tab and the condom unrolls. Time to deployment: two or three seconds, said company president Jon Kinyon, down from an average of 20 to 30.

Hot Rod may soon have some competition, however. A South African firm also has developed an applicator, a set of polyethylene tabs built right into the condom packet.

Crack the pack open, slide the condom on by pulling on the tabs--think flight attendant instructions for inflating your life vest--then unhook the applicator and voila. It takes 3 seconds to apply, according to Roelf Mulder, managing director of Dot Dot Dot Ex Why Zed, the firm that developed it.

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