



What are Dental Dams?

Dental dams are small, thin, square pieces of latex or polyurethane that are used for oral-vaginal or oral-anal sex. They acquire their name from their use in dental procedures. Dental dams help to reduce the transmission of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) during oral sex by acting as a barrier to vaginal and anal secretions that contain bacteria and viruses. They come in a variety of sizes and flavors, so you can find a dam that satisfies your tastes. It is also possible to create your own dental dam (see below).

Sexual Health Benefits

Because dental dams act as a barrier to body fluids, they help reduce STI transmission. Many sexually transmitted infections, such as herpes, genital warts and HIV can be passed through the secretions in oral sex. Like condoms, dental dams must be used correctly and consistently in order to be effective. Although it may seem a little awkward to use at first, dental dams are extremely easy to use.

Many people believe that using a dam will nullify the enjoyment of oral sex. That's not how it has to be! Granted, the feeling of latex will be different than a tongue, but that is not necessarily a bad thing. Using a dental dam with water-based lube can offer your partner a new type of stimulation. Although oral sex is considered less risky than vaginal or anal sex, there is still a risk of transmitting STIs. To be as safe as possible, use a dental dam for every act of oral sex.

How Do I Use a Dental Dam?

- Use a new dental dam for each sexual activity (i.e. get a new one for vaginal oral sex if you have just performed anal oral sex). Movement from one body part to another can transfer germs.
- Only use one side of the dental dam (do not flip it over!) and never reuse or share the same dental dam with your partner.
- Make sure there are no holes or tears in the dental dam. Check the dental dam by holding it up to light or check to see if any water can go through it.
- If the dental dam has cornstarch on it, rinse that off with water (starch in the vagina can lead to an infection).
- Do not use any oil based lubricants such as Vaseline, petroleum jelly, baby oil, or lotions. Oil based lubricants can break down the material of the dental dam, causing it to leak or tear.
- Hold the dental dam over the vagina or anus during oral sex. Make sure that the dental dam stays in place.
- Store the dental dam in a cool, dry place away from direct sunlight. Heat and sunlight can break down latex which can cause the dental dam to tear.

How Can I Make My Own Dental Dam?

- If you do not have a dental dam handy, you can make a dental dam from an un-lubricated or flavored male condom. Open the condom package, cut off the reservoir tip, and slit the condom longways. The condom will unfold into a rectangle (as indicated on the right). Do not use if there are tears in the condom.
- If you do not have a dental dam or condom handy, you can use plastic wrap instead of a dental dam. However, be aware that there is little to no research about the effectiveness of this barrier method. Make sure there are no tears in the plastic.

