



No glove, no love? Many guys are still too bashful to pony up for their prophylactics

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Page: 6

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Last time I bought condoms, they were made of sheep intestine.

I wore my collar up and my tuque low and nervously wisecracked with the drugstore clerk.

"Gonna be ba-a-a-a-d tonight." Or something like that.

AIDS burst the bubble on sheep- or lambskin, which is comfy as hell, but porous.

eBay is one of the few places you can still buy them.

For reasons too complicated to recount, I don't need 'em anyway.

But some things haven't changed.

A young man's fancy still lightly turns to thoughts of condoms the week before Valentine's.

Most still blush and stammer when they buy them.

Memories of those awkward moments are triggered by a package on my desk yesterday. Inside, among other delicacies, is lubricant and a 12-pack of Durex Love condoms.

The promo is from a young company called **Well.ca**, run by **Ali Asaria**, 27, son of a Guelph pharmacist.

Ali had the idea to take the family store to far-flung towns like Mount Forest and Wingham by Internet.

Quickly, he realized condoms were outselling face creams by a country mile. **Well.ca** now ships coast to coast.

SILENT CONVERSATION

No need to shuffle your feet, hem and haw, and hope the cashier doesn't yell "Price check on the small Trojans, please!"

"Even in this day and age, it's uncomfortable," Asaria tells me.

"It should be like buying a pack of gum, but there's this silent conversation going on between you and the cashier."

Especially if the cashier looks like your mother. Or like Andre the Giant.

So some shoppers pilfer rather than face the gauntlet at the register.

Condoms cost as little as 50 cents each, yet as theft targets they rank up there with pricey razor blades and Nicorette gum.

Many pharmacies in the States have moved them back behind the counter.

Or, worse, to locked bins.

What fun. Choose your condom while a smirking store clerk jangling keys hovers over your shoulder.

Not in Canada yet, judging by a phone tour of GTA drugstores.

Instead, prophylactics are usually on upper shelves and in aisles where staff can keep an eye.

"But you won't find them near toys or other children's things," vows Jim Shopland, the well-named chief of sexual health products for Pharmasave.

In my Scarborough drug store, condoms are stashed beside the elbow braces, oddly enough. Must be confusing for some fellas.

Of course, condoms aren't the only drugstore item to make you bashful. No guy enjoys buying tampons for his wife.

Who looks a cashier in the eye while purchasing an enema kit, a lice comb, Beano, hemorrhoid cream, wart remover or a back shaver?

Life sure can get disgusting.

Pharmacy clerks have seen it all.

"They're trained to handle customers discreetly," says Shopland.

Ever notice how quickly they bag personal products? You hope.

'VERY, VERY HOT'

Alana Rose knows a thing or two about the rubber business.

She manages the Condom Shack on Queen St. West.

It's near a "cannabis culture" shop and a tattoo parlour, so nobody around here is easily embarrassed.

What's big in the condom game, Alana?

"Japanese," she says.

First cars, now condoms?

"Very, very hot. They use a refined latex, they're thinner, stronger and they don't smell like a tire."

Just as there are 17-inch tires and 33-inch tires, condoms nowadays come in sizes, including XXL.

No one is cruel, or stupid, enough, to market a "small" condom. Instead, they are "snug" or "form-fitting."

And, says Alana, "you've got your flavours and your glow-in-the-dark and your studded and your ribbed and your puffy top."

Your what?

"Puffy top." She shows me. There's a bigger pouch at the tip. Better sensation for everyone involved.

Perfect for that game of Strippopoly, on a nearby shelf with the Love Cuffs and My First Vibe.

"The difference between us and a drug store," says Alana, "is that the person next to you might be buying a dildo. So, no big deal."

Still, there is condomshack.com if you're shy.

Or sheepish.