

Diaphragms

The diaphragm is a dome-shaped rubber cup surrounded by a circular spring. It prevents fertilization and pregnancy by providing a mechanical barrier between sperm and the cervix. Spermicidal jelly or cream is used with a diaphragm to immobilize sperm on contact and to provide extra protection against unplanned pregnancy. Diaphragms come in different sizes to fit different women. If you choose to use a diaphragm, you will need to be fitted with the diaphragm by your health care provider. Replacement of the diaphragm is recommended every two years.

EFFECTIVENESS

The diaphragm is an effective method if used conscientiously; however, statistics on effectiveness vary widely. Some studies show up to 98% effectiveness *if the diaphragm is used correctly all the time*. Other studies show rates as low as 80%.

Effectiveness ranges from 90 to 98% depending on:

- Consistent and careful use.
- Proper fit.
- Adequate amount of spermicidal cream or jelly applied correctly.
- Care taken to avoid tearing or puncturing the diaphragm.

ADVANTAGES

- Inexpensive.
- Does not interfere with sex. Once in place neither you nor your partner should be able to feel it.
- Is effective immediately.
- Few side effects.

SIDE EFFECTS

There are no side effects, except possible allergic reactions to rubber and/or spermicidal agent in either partner. If this occurs, you can try switching brands of spermicide. Growth of microorganisms can occur if the diaphragm is left in place too long. It should be removed and washed after each use. Wearing the diaphragm continuously can result in vaginal irritation or infection. There is also a slightly increased risk of a urinary tract infection in women who use the diaphragm.

USING A DIAPHRAGM

Once you have been fitted for a diaphragm, practice putting it in. You will be assisted in the office for the first practice session after being measured, so you know you are inserting it correctly. Ease of use comes with practice and frequency of use. You may be asked to return with the diaphragm in place for a re-check and to discuss/solve any problems.

Re-measurement is necessary if you gain or lose about 15 pounds and is highly recommended at your annual pelvic exam and Pap smear appointment. After each pregnancy, request a re-measurement and refitting.

Inserting the Diaphragm: Follow the steps for inserting your diaphragm. The best way to know if the diaphragm is in correctly is to see if you can feel your cervix through the diaphragm. The center of the cervix has a dimple-like feel. The cervix is harder and more substantial than anything else felt through the diaphragm in the vagina.

Steps for Inserting the Diaphragm:

Step 1: Put at least a teaspoonful of jelly or cream inside the dome of the diaphragm and spread a little around in the inside rim. Jelly and cream are equally effective. Jelly is more lubricating and may be less messy. Try both to see which you prefer. (Note: Do not use Vaseline or other petroleum products. They will erode the rubber.)

Step 2: With one hand, hold the diaphragm dome down and pinch the rim together. Spread the lips of your vagina with the other hand. While squatting or standing with one leg propped on something, insert the diaphragm vaginally as if aiming for the tailbone. The diaphragm may also be inserted while lying down.

Step 3: Tuck the front rim up behind the ridge in the vagina created by the pubic bone. If you drop your diaphragm during the insertion procedure, wash it off and start all over. The woman is not the only one who can insert a diaphragm; your partner might enjoy playing a more active role by inserting the diaphragm.

Using Spermicide: If you have had the diaphragm in for two hours or more prior to intercourse, insert an extra application of jelly or cream (without removing the diaphragm). Spermicide becomes less effective over time, so if intercourse is repeated, another applicator full of jelly or cream must be inserted each time. DO NOT remove the diaphragm to do this. Spermicide needs 6 to 8 hours to do the job, so leave the diaphragm in for at least that long after intercourse. The diaphragm should be removed as soon as possible thereafter.

Removing the Diaphragm: To remove the diaphragm, hook a finger under the forward rim just behind the pubic bone and pull. Pushing as if expelling a bowel movement will also aid in removal of the diaphragm. (Note: Long fingernails can puncture the diaphragm.)

CARE OF YOUR DIAPHRAGM

Wash the diaphragm with soap and water and dry it. Keep it in its container when not in use. Check for holes by holding it up to the light or filling it with water.

SCHEDULING AN APPOINTMENT

Call 275-2662 to schedule an appointment at the University Health Service (UHS). UHS offers a full range of gynecological and contraceptive services. You can schedule an appointment with your primary care provider (PCP) or with one of the women's health nurse practitioners for gynecological care and to discuss contraceptive options. All visits to UHS are strictly confidential.

LINKS

Planned Parenthood
<http://www.plannedparenthood.org/>