DIAPHRAGM

Accessibility

Access to the Diaphragm is limited in Canada. To find out who is still carrying the Diaphragm please call the Sex Sense line at 1 800 SEX SENSE.

What is a diaphragm?

A diaphragm is a method of birth control used by women. It is a soft, thin, dome-shaped rubber cup with a flexible rim. Spermicidal jelly is placed inside the dome. The diaphragm is placed high in the vagina to hold the spermicide against the cervix. The diaphragm comes in various sizes and must be fitted by a clinician to be effective.

The diaphragm acts as a barrier between the opening of the cervix and semen which contains sperm. The fit may not be tight enough to stop all the sperm from getting past the diaphragm; therefore, the spermicide is used to kill the sperm.

- It can be inserted several hours before intercourse, but it must be left in the vagina for at least 6 hours following the last episode of intercourse. Additional spermicidal jelly should be inserted into the vagina before each act of intercourse without removing the diaphragm.
- It can be left in for up to 24 hours total time.
- You use it only when having intercourse. It is not meant to be used as a menstrual product.
- The diaphragm is not considered to be an effective method of protection against sexually transmitted infections.

How effective is it?

The contraceptive effectiveness of this method of birth control ranges from 84% (actual use) to 94% (perfect use). Diaphragms must be used with spermicide to be effective.

Advantages

- It is female controlled and does not require partner assistance
- There is an immediate return to fertility as it offers contraception only when needed
- It can be used for 2–3 years (if cleaned and stored properly)
- It can be inserted several hours before intercourse
- It can be left in for up to 24 hours total time (intercourse may be repeated in that time frame, however, additional spermicide should be inserted into vagina while leaving the diaphragm in place. (Please read spermicide fact sheet for side effects, advantages, and disadvantages)
Disadvantages

- Reduces spontaneity
- Need to be comfortable touching your vagina
- Requires visit to clinic or physician for fitting

Are there any problems using a diaphragm?

- If you or your partner is allergic to latex, you will need to be fitted with a silicone diaphragm, which may be more costly.
- The use of a diaphragm can increase the risk of getting a urinary tract infection in some women. The diaphragm should be carefully washed and dried after use to avoid infections.
- The wrong-size diaphragm can cause cramping or pelvic pain, and will not provide effective protection against pregnancy. Refit your diaphragm after a 10 lb. weight gain or loss.
- Although rare, cases of toxic shock syndrome (TSS) have been reported with diaphragm use during the menstrual period. It is recommended that a diaphragm not be used if you are bleeding from your vagina for any reason or have a vaginal, cervical or pelvic infection. Use another method of birth control such as condoms during your period.

How do I care for my diaphragm?

- After you take out your diaphragm, wash it with a mild soap like Ivory. Rinse and dry it well and put it away in its compact. Keeping your diaphragm away from heat and light will decrease the chance of weakening the rubber.
- A regularly used diaphragm can last two to three years.
- Products such as baby powder, body powder, or face powder seem to damage the rubber and should be avoided. You can dust your diaphragm with plain cornstarch, but be sure to wash it off before using again.
- Oil-based products like Vaseline or hand cream damage the diaphragm

Recommendations

- Until you are sure the diaphragm is staying in place or until your first return visit to the clinic, use a back-up method of birth control such as condoms or oral contraceptive pills.
- Cases of toxic shock syndrome (TSS) have been reported with diaphragm use during the menstrual period. It is recommended that a diaphragm not be used if you are bleeding from your vagina for any reason or have a vaginal, cervical or pelvic infection. Use another method of birth control such as foam and condoms during your period.

When do I need to have my diaphragm checked?

- Return to the clinic or healthcare provider for a fit check approximately four weeks after getting your diaphragm.
- It is recommended to have a refitting yearly, and after a weight gain or loss of 10 or more pounds, after abortion, or after a pregnancy.
- During a routine yearly exam and Pap test your healthcare provider will check the fit and examine the diaphragm.
- If you feel irritation or discomfort, make a diaphragm check appointment.

www.optionsforsexualhealth.org