

# Diaphragm

## What is a diaphragm?

A diaphragm is a type of birth control that is put in the vagina each time you have intercourse. It covers the opening of the uterus (cervix) and stops sperm from entering the uterus.

A diaphragm:

- is made of latex or silicone
- is disc-shaped
- has a flexible rim

A diaphragm **must** be used with a special type of vaginal gel that kills sperm (spermicidal gel).

## How well does a diaphragm work?

- 8 to 9 out of 10 women will get pregnant in one year if having intercourse without birth control.
- With typical use (this means not following the exact directions) the diaphragm is **84 percent** effective.
- With perfect use (this means you follow the exact directions all the time) the diaphragm is **94 percent** effective.
- The diaphragm doesn't protect you from sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and HIV.
- Use a condom **every time** you have sex (vaginal, oral, anal) to lower your risk of STIs and HIV.

## How do I start using a diaphragm?

To get a diaphragm, you will need to see your healthcare provider. You need a prescription to buy a diaphragm. Diaphragms come in different sizes. Your healthcare provider will fit you for a diaphragm.

You need to get fitted for a new diaphragm:

- after you have a baby
- if you gain or lose more than 10 lbs. (4.5 kg)
- after pelvic surgery

You need to use a cream or jelly spermicide with a diaphragm.

Spermicides contain nonoxynol-9, which can cause your vagina to get irritated. This irritation can increase your risk of getting HIV and STIs.

### **How do I use a diaphragm?**

- Put your diaphragm in **before** you have intercourse.
- It must stay in for at least **6 hours** after intercourse.
- Don't keep your diaphragm in for more than **24 hours**.
- You will have to touch your vagina to put in and take out your diaphragm.

### ***Putting Your Diaphragm In***

1. Empty your bladder **before** you put your diaphragm in to prevent a bladder infection.
2. Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
3. Put 1 tablespoon of spermicide (cream or jelly) inside the diaphragm. The spermicide needs to be on the side of the diaphragm that will be right next to the cervix.
4. Lie down, squat, or raise one leg on a chair.
5. Squeeze the rim together and push the diaphragm into the vagina, as far as it will go towards the back bone (see Figure 1).
6. When the diaphragm is most of the way in, let go of it and tuck the front edge of the diaphragm up behind the pubic bone.
7. Make sure you can **feel your cervix** (it feels like the tip of your nose) through the diaphragm.
8. If your diaphragm is in the right place you should not feel it. If it isn't comfortable, it is likely not in the right place. Take it out and try again.

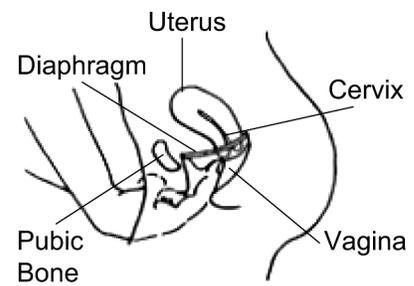


Figure 2

If you have intercourse **more than once**:

- leave the diaphragm in
- put an applicator of spermicidal cream or jelly into the vagina

### ***Taking Out Your Diaphragm***

1. Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
2. Hook your finger under the rim and pull the diaphragm down and out.
3. Be careful not to poke a hole in your diaphragm.

## *Caring for Your Diaphragm*

- Wash your diaphragm after each use with mild, unscented soap and warm water.
- Rinse and dry it completely.
- Store it in a cool, dry place.
- Check it regularly for holes by holding it up to a light.
- Replace your diaphragm every 1 to 3 years or sooner if you notice a hole, tear, rip, or the rim is bent. Replace silicone diaphragms when the silicone gets harder and loses elasticity.
- When you buy a diaphragm, always read and follow the enclosed manufacturer's directions.

## **What are the benefits of a diaphragm?**

- The diaphragm doesn't have hormones. There is no effect on a woman's natural hormones. It is a good choice for a woman who can't use hormonal birth control.
- You can insert a diaphragm up to **2 hours before** having sex.
- A diaphragm is reused. You only need to replace your diaphragm every 1 to 3 years, or if the rim is bent or the diaphragm is damaged.

## **What are the disadvantages of a diaphragm?**

- Don't use a diaphragm if you or your partner have an allergy to latex, silicone, or spermicide.
- Using a diaphragm might increase your risk of a bladder infection, yeast infection, or bacterial vaginosis.
- A diaphragm can move out of place during sex. If this happens the sperm can enter the uterus, which means there is a chance you could get pregnant.
- Don't use your diaphragm when you have your period. There is a small risk that you could get a very bad infection called toxic shock syndrome. Use a different method of **birth control** (e.g., condoms, abstinence) during your period.
- Don't use your diaphragm if you are treating a yeast infection, using vaginal medicine, cream, ovules, tablets, or any estrogen creams. These products can damage your diaphragm.
- Don't have sex (abstinence) while using vaginal creams, ovules, or tablets for **3 days after** you are done your treatment.

## Did You Know

- You have the right to make the decision to have sex or not.
- Plan ahead and decide to protect yourself to lower your risk of pregnancy, STIs, and HIV.
- It is important to talk with your partner about how you can protect each other.
- Always use spermicide with another method of birth control (e.g., condoms).
- Natural vaginal spermicides might not be as effective. You can buy natural vaginal spermicides at some drugstores or online pharmacies. These spermicides are different than the ones described in this handout.
- Think about getting **emergency contraception** to help prevent pregnancy if your diaphragm moved out of place while you had sex or you have had unprotected sex.
- Only use **water-based** lubricants with a diaphragm. Oil-based products can break the diaphragm.

## Websites

[www.myhealth.alberta.ca](http://www.myhealth.alberta.ca)

[www.sexualityandu.ca](http://www.sexualityandu.ca)

[www.teachingsexualhealth.ca](http://www.teachingsexualhealth.ca)

[www.albertahealthservices.ca](http://www.albertahealthservices.ca) and search for Sexual and Reproductive Health

For 24/7 nurse advice and general health information, call Health Link Alberta at 403-943-LINK (5465) in the Calgary area, 780-408-5465 in the Edmonton area, or 1-866-408-LINK (5465) toll-free.

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