

Diaphragm

What is a diaphragm?

A diaphragm is a barrier method of birth control that is put in the vagina before having vaginal sex to prevent pregnancy. It is a disc-shaped cup with a flexible rim that can be made of latex, silicone, or nylon. It covers the cervix and stops sperm from entering the uterus.



There are two types of diaphragms:

- A **fitted** diaphragm is measured to fit your cervix
- A **one size** diaphragm (e.g., FemCap®, Caya SILCS®)

Contraceptive Gels

A diaphragm needs to be used with a contraceptive gel, either nonoxynol-9 spermicidal gel or an acid buffering gel.

Nonoxynol-9 spermicidal gel/jelly is the most effective kind of contraceptive gel. It:

- prevents pregnancy by killing sperm.
- is no longer made in Canada so it can be hard to find. Some people order it online or pick it up while travelling internationally.
- can cause genital irritation.
- is not recommended for people who are at high risk of getting HIV.

Lactic acid buffering gel can be used if you can't get nonoxynol-9 spermicidal gel. It:

- is also called a barrier gel (e.g., Contragel®, Caya Gel®).
- helps to seal the diaphragm around the cervix.
- lowers pH of vaginal fluid to slow down sperm.
- may be less effective at preventing pregnancy than spermicidal gel, but may cause less genital irritation.

How well does a diaphragm work?

- With typical use (not following the exact directions) a **fitted** diaphragm with **spermicidal gel** is 84% effective.
- With perfect use (following the exact directions all the time) a **fitted** diaphragm with **spermicidal gel** is 94% effective.
- Using a diaphragm with an **acid buffering gel** may be less effective at preventing pregnancy than using a diaphragm with spermicidal gel. The exact effectiveness is unknown.

- One size diaphragms are likely as good at preventing pregnancy as fitted diaphragms, but the exact effectiveness is unknown.
- Diaphragms don't protect you from sexually transmitted infections (STIs) or HIV.

What are the benefits of a diaphragm?

- The diaphragm doesn't have hormones.
- It can be used by people who are breastfeeding.
- It can be combined with other methods of birth control (e.g., external condoms).
- A diaphragm is reusable and can last up to 2 years, depending on manufacturer's instructions.

What are the disadvantages of a diaphragm?

- Some people could have an allergy to the materials in a diaphragm, such as latex, silicone, or spermicide.
- Using a diaphragm may increase your risk of a bladder infection.
- There is a small risk of having toxic shock syndrome, especially if the diaphragm is left in for more than 24 hours.
- A diaphragm can move out of place during sex. If this happens it may not protect you from pregnancy.
- Diaphragms need to be used correctly to prevent pregnancy. Consider using emergency contraception if it wasn't used the right way or if it moved out of place during sex.

How do I start using a diaphragm?

First, decide if a diaphragm is right for you. You may be considering a diaphragm if you:

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| • want or need birth control that doesn't contain hormones. | • need an extra method of birth control (e.g., after missing pills). |
| • are breastfeeding. | • need protection from pregnancy only occasionally. |
| • are comfortable inserting and removing it. | |
| • are comfortable with a higher risk of an unplanned pregnancy. | |

To get a **fitted** diaphragm, a health care provider needs to measure the size of your cervix and prescribe the correct size for you. Some sexual health clinics offer diaphragm fittings. They can also help you order your size and show you how to use it.

You need to get refitted for a new fitted diaphragm:

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

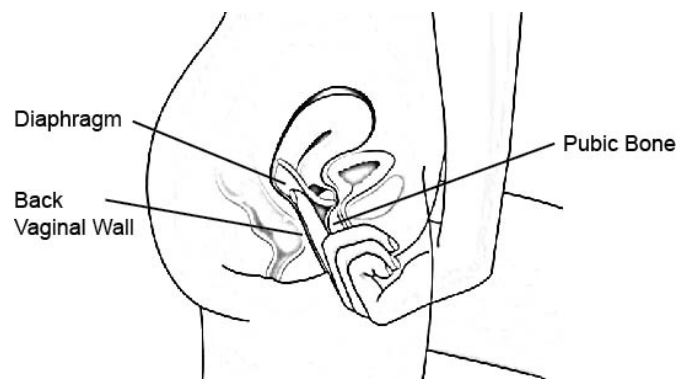
A **one size** diaphragm fits most (but not all) people. It does not need a prescription and can be bought online or at pharmacies. You may have to ask the pharmacist for it, or they may have to order one in for you.

How do I use a diaphragm?

When you buy a diaphragm, always read and follow the enclosed manufacturer's directions. You need to use a contraceptive gel, either a spermicidal gel or an acid buffering gel.

Inserting your diaphragm

1. Put your diaphragm in up to 2 hours **before** you have sex.
2. Empty your bladder **before** you put your diaphragm in to help prevent a bladder infection.
3. Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
4. Check the diaphragm for holes, cracks, and tears by holding it up to the light. Check the expiry on the gel.
5. Put spermicidal or acid buffering gel inside the diaphragm and along the rim. The gel needs to be on the side of the diaphragm that will be right next to the cervix.
6. Lie down, squat, or raise one leg on a chair or toilet.
7. Squeeze the rim together and push the diaphragm into the vagina along the back vaginal wall as far as it will go.
8. 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.
9. Make sure you can feel your cervix (it feels like the tip of your nose) through the diaphragm.
10. If your diaphragm is in the right place, you shouldn't feel it. If it's uncomfortable, it's likely not in the right place. Take it out and try again.



Use an applicator to add extra spermicidal or acid buffering gel into your vagina each time you have sex, or if it's been more than 2 hours since gel was put in. Do **not** remove the diaphragm to do this.

Taking Out Your Diaphragm

1. The diaphragm must stay in for at least **6 hours** after the last ejaculation into the vagina. This reduces the chance that the sperm will fertilize the egg.
2. Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
3. Hook your finger under the rim and pull the diaphragm down and out gently to avoid damaging it.
4. Don't keep your diaphragm in for more than 24 hours.

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.
- Replace your diaphragm according to the manufacturer's instructions (usually every 1-2 years), or sooner if you notice any damage.
- Water-based lubricants and contraceptive gels are safe with any diaphragm. Oil-based products can damage latex diaphragms.

Did you know

- You have the right to decide to have sex or not. Talk with your partner(s) about consent.
- There's an 85% chance of becoming pregnant within one year if no birth control is used for vaginal sex.
- Use a condom/barrier every time you have sex (oral, vaginal, anal). Condoms help prevent pregnancy, STIs and HIV.
- You can lower your risk of HIV by taking an HIV prevention pill every day. Many Albertans can get it for free. Visit www.prepalberta.ca to find out more.
- Transgender and gender diverse people who have a uterus can use hormonal birth control. It can help prevent pregnancy and make periods lighter and less painful.

Websites

- ahs.ca/srh
- ReadyorNotAlberta.ca
- TeachingSexualHealth.ca
- myhealth.alberta.ca
- sexandu.ca

For 24/7 nurse advice and general health information, call Health Link at **811**.



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