

# Commonly Asked Questions About Diaphragms

## What is a Diaphragm?

A diaphragm is a dome-shaped latex cup with a flexible rim. It fits in your vagina and covers your cervix (the opening to your uterus). When it fits right, neither you nor your partner should feel it during intercourse.

## How Does it Work?

The diaphragm holds spermicidal cream or jelly close to your cervix. The cream or jelly kill sperm that enter your vagina. Sperm are also kept from entering your uterus or fallopian tubes. This keeps your egg from being fertilized.

## How Well Does it Work?

Studies vary on how well diaphragms keep women from getting pregnant. Some show as few as 2 pregnancies in 100 women while others show up to 20 pregnancies in 100 women.

To make sure the diaphragm works as well as possible, the diaphragm:

- needs to be fitted correctly at the clinic
- must be used right each time you have intercourse
- must be checked for proper placement in your cervix with each use
- must be kept in for 6 hours after intercourse.

You will be taught how to use the diaphragm at the clinic.

## What are the Advantages of Using a Diaphragm?

- There are no serious health risks.
- The diaphragm, spermicide or both may help protect you from getting sexually transmitted diseases.
- This is the only protection you need when you have intercourse.

## What are Possible Side Effects?

- You or your partner could have a latex or spermicidal jelly allergy. This is not common.
- You may have bladder infections more often. To keep this from occurring, empty your bladder after intercourse. Call the clinic if you have frequent or painful urination. These are signs of an infection.
- You may be at risk for toxic shock syndrome if you leave the diaphragm in for more than 24 hours.

## Who Should Not Use a Diaphragm?

You should not use a diaphragm if:

- you have a latex or spermicidal jelly allergy (silicone products may be available)
- you are uncomfortable touching your vagina or cervix.

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## How Do You Get One?

Diaphragms come in many sizes with many types of rims. During a pelvic exam, your health care provider will decide what size and type is best for you. He or she will teach you to insert, check and remove the diaphragm.

## How Do You Use a Diaphragm?

You can insert the diaphragm up to 5 hours before intercourse. It must be used with spermicidal cream or jelly.

### To insert a diaphragm:

- Squeeze about 1 tablespoon of jelly into the cup of the diaphragm.
- With one hand, hold the lips of your vagina open. With the other hand, fold the diaphragm and insert it into your vagina. Push it toward the small of your back and in as far as it will go. Tuck the front rim behind your pelvic bone. Check to make sure the cervix is covered.
- Leave the diaphragm in place for 6 hours after intercourse.

### If you want to have intercourse again:

- Leave the diaphragm in place. Insert an applicator of jelly into your vagina before intercourse or use a condom.
- If more than 6 hours have passed since your last intercourse, you may remove and clean the diaphragm, apply more jelly and re-insert it.
- Leave the diaphragm in for 6 hours after the last act of intercourse. Do not douche during that time.
- You should not have your diaphragm in for more than 24 hours at one time.

### To remove a diaphragm:

- Put your finger behind the front rim and pull down and out.
- If the diaphragm seems “stuck,” put your finger behind the rim to break the suction. You may also bear down like you are having a bowel movement. If you can’t remove it, call the clinic.
- Wash off the diaphragm, rinse it well, dry it and store it in its container.
- Keep the diaphragm away from heat and dust.
- Before using it again, check to make sure it has no tears and defects.

## What if You Want to Get Pregnant?

Simply stop using the diaphragm.

## When Should You Call the Clinic?

Call the clinic if you:

- have any discomfort from the diaphragm
- gain or lose more than 20 pounds
- have an abortion, miscarriage or a baby.

## What You Should Remember

- Vaseline or perfumed powders can damage a diaphragm.
- Always use the diaphragm with spermicidal cream or jelly. Use it every time you have intercourse.
- Foams and suppositories are not to be used with a diaphragm.
- Check the diaphragm for tears or holes each time you use it.
- Your partner can learn to insert and remove the diaphragm.