



Diaphragm



Community and Health
Services Department

What is the diaphragm?

The diaphragm is a barrier method of birth control. It is a shallow cup made of latex and shaped like a dome. It has a flexible steel rim that is also covered in latex. Spermicide must be used with the diaphragm for it to be effective in preventing pregnancy.

How does the diaphragm work?

- the diaphragm is placed in front of the cervix (the opening to the uterus) and prevents the sperm from entering the cervix
- the spermicidal cream or jelly placed inside the diaphragm kills the sperm on contact
- the diaphragm can be inserted up to one hour before sexual intercourse and must be left in place for six hours after intercourse. It should not be left in place more than 24 hours

How effective is the diaphragm?

The diaphragm is 87 percent effective. In other words, with typical use, of every 100 women who use this method during one year, 13 will become pregnant.

What are the advantages and disadvantages of the diaphragm?

Advantages

- it is inexpensive
- it provides some protection against bacterial sexually transmitted infections (STIs) by creating a mechanical barrier
- it is only used when you need it
- you or your partner cannot feel it
- you do not have to interrupt sex to put it in
- your partner does not have to be involved with inserting it
- it is reversible and does not cause any changes to your body

Disadvantages

- it requires you to plan ahead to ensure you insert the diaphragm before sex
- spermicide cream and jelly may cause irritation
- it must be fitted by a skilled clinician
- it does not protect against viral STIs such as hepatitis, herpes, human papillomavirus and HIV
- it needs to be cleaned after each use
- you will need a new diaphragm fitting if you lose or gain more than 10 lbs, have a pregnancy, abortion or pelvic surgery
- you need to feel comfortable putting the diaphragm into your vagina
- there is an increased risk of urinary tract infections and of toxic shock syndrome

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If you have any questions, please call York Region *Health Connection* at **1-800-361-5653**
or visit **www.york.ca/sexualhealth**

Who may not be able to use the diaphragm?

- a woman (or partner) who has sensitivities or allergies to latex, rubber or spermicide
- women whose uterus, bladder or rectum has fallen or slipped from its usual position
- women who have physical or developmental challenges that affect their ability to place the diaphragm correctly

How to use:

1. Place about one teaspoon of spermicidal jelly or cream in the dome of the diaphragm and spread a small amount around the rim.
2. Hold the diaphragm, dome down, and squeeze the sides of the diaphragm together with the fingers of one hand. Using your index finger as a guide, gently insert the diaphragm as far back in the vagina as it will go.
3. Check that you have covered the cervix. Your cervix feels like a smooth bump (like the end of your nose) towards the back of your vagina.
4. If you inserted the diaphragm more than one hour prior to having sexual intercourse, you must insert another application of jelly or cream.
5. You must leave the diaphragm in place for at least six hours following intercourse, but no longer than 24 hours.
6. To remove the diaphragm, hook a finger over or under the rim, pull down and out. Once you have removed the diaphragm, wash it with warm water and a mild soap. Once dry, you may dust your diaphragm with cornstarch to maintain the appearance and reduce odour.
7. The diaphragm should be stored in its case and away from heat.
8. Check for holes after each use by filling with water or holding up to the light. Your diaphragm should last one to two years, but check the expiry date also.
9. Do not use Vaseline or other oil based lubricants. If required, a water based lubricant can be used.

Diaphragms do not fully protect you from sexually transmitted infections. Condoms should be used with the diaphragm each time you have sex.

