

## WHAT IS IT?

A diaphragm is a shallow dome of thin rubber with a firm, flexible rim. It fits inside in the vagina so that it covers the cervix (entrance to the womb) and tucks in behind the pubic bone. It is held in position by the pelvic muscles.

## HOW DOES IT WORK?

The diaphragm is a barrier method of contraception. When the man ejaculates (cums) inside the woman, the diaphragm stops the sperm getting into the womb and prevents pregnancy.

The diaphragm is left in place after intercourse for a further six hours (or longer if wished) during which time any sperm in the vagina die.

Two types of diaphragms are available in Australia, the coil-spring and the arcing-spring or 'all-flex' diaphragm

## IS IT EFFECTIVE?

The diaphragm is **80-94%** effective. Effectiveness increases with experience, consistent use and correct fitting of the diaphragm.

## FITTING THE DIAPHRAGM

Diaphragms come in different types and sizes. It is important to be fitted for one that suits you. This can be done at a Family Planning Clinic or by other health professionals that have been trained in the fitting of diaphragms.

The diaphragm can be put in at any convenient time before you have sex but must be left in place for at least six hours after intercourse.

## LOOKING AFTER YOUR DIAPHRAGM

After removing your diaphragm, wash it in warm water with mild soap, rinse it in clear water, dry it carefully and keep it in a firm container away from heat. Remember that your diaphragm is made from rubber which can perish so dry it thoroughly before you store it and keep in a cool place. A little corn flour sprinkled in the container helps to keep the diaphragm dry. Don't use talcum powder because this contains perfumes and preservatives that may damage the rubber.

Avoid contact with oil-based lubricants and some medications that are placed in the vagina, such as pessaries for thrush.

Check the diaphragm regularly for holes by holding it up to the light. Rubber becomes sticky or tacky when it starts to perish, so check for this too.

As an extra precaution take your diaphragm along to be checked when you have your Pap test. If you notice a hole or tear in your diaphragm or if it feels tacky, do not use it. Use another form of contraception, e.g. condoms, and get a new diaphragm as soon as possible.

## SPERMICIDE AND THE DIAPHRAGM

Although traditionally the diaphragm has been used with spermicide, many women now use the diaphragm on its own. There is no good evidence that using spermicide makes the diaphragm more effective, so it is your choice.

If you decide to use spermicide, you only need to use it when you are putting your diaphragm in. There is no need to insert extra spermicide each time you have sex during the time the diaphragm would normally be left in place.

## USING THE DIAPHRAGM DURING YOUR 'UNSAFE' TIME ONLY

Some women use their diaphragms only during their fertile ('unsafe') time and use no contraception during the rest of their cycle. If you want to do this, it is vital that you know how to recognise your 'safe' and 'unsafe' times. Don't guess. For further information contact Family Planning Tasmania or a Natural Family Planning centre.

## IF YOUR DIAPHRAGM IS UNCOMFORTABLE

If your diaphragm has been fitted properly you should not be able to feel it. If you notice any of the following

- Discomfort wearing the diaphragm
- Discomfort during intercourse
- Dislodgement of the diaphragm or movement during intercourse

See your nurse or doctor you may need a different size or some other type of contraception may be more suitable.



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## WEARING YOUR DIAPHRAGM ALL THE TIME

If you want to, you can wear your diaphragm all the time. If you do this you should remove it once a day for washing. Be careful, however, not to remove it before the necessary **6** hours have passed since intercourse. If you want to use it this way it is a good idea to have two diaphragms so you can alternate them. This will reduce the chance of the diaphragm developing an unpleasant smell. Also, while you are menstruating, it is best not to leave the diaphragm in for more than 12 hours at a time.

## WHO CAN USE A DIAPHRAGM?

- A diaphragm can be suitable for women who:
- Prefer not to use a hormonal contraceptive such as the Pill
- Wants a contraception that is only used when required
- Who are willing to accept that there is a higher risk of pregnancy

## WHO ISN'T THE DIAPHRAGM SUITABLE FOR?

- The diaphragm may not be suitable for women who:
- May have vaginal or uterine problems or abnormalities
- Are unable to insert the diaphragm or feel the cervix
- Need highly effective protection against pregnancy
- Suffer from recurrent urinary tract and/or vaginal infections
- Have poor muscle tone in the pelvic floor
- Have a history of toxic shock syndrome

## WHAT SIDE EFFECTS ARE LIKELY?

Side effects are rare but some women do have an allergy to the latex rubber used in diaphragms, or to the spermicide if they use one.

## PROBLEMS

If the diaphragm moves out of place, breaks or you have forgotten to put it in before sex, Emergency contraception should be considered. Emergency contraception is available from the Chemist without a script or from Family Planning clinics.

## REMEMBER

To check that your diaphragm is still the right size for you:

- 6 weeks after giving birth
- If you have gained or lost around 5 kg of weight
- If it is uncomfortable for you or your partner when it is in place.

## WHERE CAN I GET IT?

Diaphragms can be bought from Family Planning Tasmania clinics and Chemists once the correct size is known.

### Disclaimer:

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