

Diaphragm

Brown Health Services Patient Education Series

What is it?

The diaphragm is a reusable contraceptive device consisting of a soft dome-shaped silicone cup with a flexible rim, similar to a saucer. An exam and fitting by a healthcare provider is recommended. All diaphragms are designed to be used with spermicide foam, gel, or cream. When used with a spermicide, the diaphragm is about 88% effective.

How does it work?

A diaphragm is bent in half and inserted into the vagina to cover the cervix. The diaphragm acts as a barrier to prevent sperm from entering the uterus and fertilizing an egg. Prior to insertion put spermicide inside the diaphragm; the diaphragm keeps the spermicide in place near the cervix. To maximize prevention of pregnancy, add more spermicide inside the vagina after insertion of the diaphragm.

How do you get a diaphragm?

Because people have different sized cervixes, these need to be fitted individually to each person by a medical provider. The fit should be checked during a pelvic exam each year and/or after every pregnancy/abortion. If you are interested in being fit for a diaphragm, a medical provider at Health Services can discuss this with you.

How do you care for a diaphragm?

- After removal, wash it with soap and water
- Let it air dry

- Don't use powder on your diaphragm-it can lead to infections
- Store your diaphragm in a clean place, away from extreme heat and cold
- Take a good look at the diaphragm every now and then to check for holes, cracks, wrinkles or weak spots-if you spot something that looks off, get a new diaphragm
- Check the fit of your diaphragm each year, if you gain or lose 10 lbs or more, or after you have been pregnant

What are some advantages?

- Easily portable non hormonal method that is effective as soon as inserted
- Most people nor their partners cannot feel the diaphragm during sex
- Easy to stop using
- Can be put in 2 hours before sex, must stay in for at least 6 hours after sex and up to 24 hours-if you have sex again, put more spermicide in vagina
- They are inexpensive and reusable
- They last up to 2 years
- Using a diaphragm increases familiarity with one's vagina and cervix

What are some disadvantages?

- Recommended to be fit by a specially-trained professional
- Does not protect against sexually transmitted infections (STIs)
- The chemical in most spermicides, nonoxynol-9, can irritate your vagina

and increase your risk of HIV and other STIs

- Urinary Tract Infections (UTIs) can occur-if this happens you may need a different size diaphragm
- Do not use a diaphragm if known history of hypersensitivity to silicone or history of Toxic Shock Syndrome (TSS)

What are the possible side effects?

- Toxic Shock Syndrome (TSS) is a very rare but serious disorder. Signs of TSS are fever of 102 or higher, headache, muscle aches, vomiting, low grade dizziness, low blood pressure, rash (looks like sunburn at first then becomes more dot-like) during or just after the menstrual period
- Vaginal soreness or irritation may occur if you are sensitive to the spermicide or the material comprising the diaphragm itself