

your guide to diaphragms and caps

Helping you choose the method
of contraception that's best for you

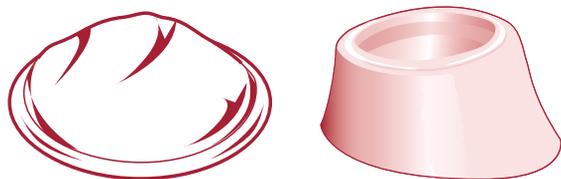


Diaphragms and caps

Diaphragms and caps are barrier methods of contraception. This means they help stop you getting pregnant by stopping sperm from meeting an egg. They fit inside your vagina and cover your cervix (entrance to the uterus – womb).

Diaphragms and caps come in different shapes and sizes. Vaginal diaphragms are circular domes made of silicone with a flexible rim. Cervical caps are smaller and are made of silicone.

To be effective, diaphragms and caps should be used with a spermicide. Spermicide is a substance



that kills sperm. It's available in different forms, such as cream or gel.

How effective are diaphragms and caps?

If they're fitted correctly and used perfectly every time you have sex, diaphragms and caps are 92–96% effective at preventing pregnancy when they're used with spermicide (a substance that kills sperm). This means that 4-8 users will get pregnant in one year.

If you don't use your diaphragms or cap perfectly every time, they're around 71-88% effective. This means that around 12-29 users will get pregnant in one year.

If 100 sexually active women don't use any contraception, 80 to 90 will get pregnant in a year.

How does a diaphragm or cap work?

Diaphragms and caps covers your cervix (entrance to the uterus) to stop sperm reaching

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an egg. They're most effective at preventing pregnancy when you also use spermicide to kill any sperm.

Can anything make a diaphragm or cap less effective?

A diaphragm or cap will be less effective if:

- it's damaged
- it doesn't cover your cervix completely
- it isn't the right size
- you use it without spermicide
- you have sex three hours or more after you put it in and don't use extra spermicide
- you don't use extra spermicide with your diaphragm or cap every time you have sex
- you remove it too soon (less than six hours after the last time you had sex).

If any of these happen, or if you've had sex without using contraception, get advice about emergency contraception (see page 11).

What are the advantages of a diaphragm or cap?

- You only have to use it when you have sex.
- It has no serious health risks.
- You're in control of your contraception.
- You can put it in before you have sex.

Add extra spermicide if sex takes place more than three hours after putting it in.

What are the disadvantages of a diaphragm or cap?

- You may find spermicide messy.
- It can take time to learn how to use it.
- You may be sensitive to spermicide. This may

cause irritation in you or a partner.

Can anyone use a diaphragm or cap?

Most people can use a diaphragm or cap. A diaphragm or cap may not suit you if you:

- have vaginal muscles which can't hold a diaphragm in place
- have a cervix which is an unusual shape, in an awkward position or if you can't reach it
- are sensitive to spermicide
- have repeated urinary infections
- have a vaginal infection (wait until after the infection has cleared)
- have ever had toxic shock syndrome
- don't feel comfortable touching your vagina
- find it difficult to put in or place in the right position.

If you have a high risk of getting a sexually transmitted infection (STI), for example if you or a partner has more than one partner, a diaphragm or cap may not be the best choice for you. Diaphragms and caps don't protect you from STIs and a chemical in spermicide called Nonoxinol 9 may increase the risk of HIV infection.

I've just had a baby. Can I use a diaphragm or cap?

Yes, but wait until at least six weeks after the birth. If you have sex earlier than this, use a different method of contraception. You may need a different size diaphragm or cap after you've had a baby so check with your doctor or nurse that the size is correct.

Can I use a diaphragm or cap after a miscarriage or abortion?

Yes. You may need a different size diaphragm or cap after a miscarriage or abortion.

Can I still use my diaphragm or cap if I've gained or lost weight?

If you lost or gained more than 3kg, you may need a different size diaphragm or cap. Talk to your doctor or nurse for more information.

Where can I get a diaphragm or cap?

You can get a diaphragm or cap from some contraception clinics, young people's services and general practices. It's also possible to buy a diaphragm or cap online or from a pharmacy. They come with instructions to help you learn to fit them, but it's recommended that you also get advice on using them from a doctor or nurse.

How do I put a diaphragm in?

For the diaphragm to be effective it needs to cover your cervix. It's helpful to feel your cervix before inserting the diaphragm (see below).

Diaphragms come with instructions. The different types are all used in a similar way. Ideally, ask a doctor or nurse to show you how to put it in before using it.

With clean hands, put a small amount of spermicide on the upper surface of the diaphragm (approximately two 2cm strips). Putting a little spermicide on the rim may make the diaphragm easier to put in.

Put your index finger (the finger next to your thumb) on top of the diaphragm. Squeeze the



diaphragm between your thumb and other fingers.



Slide the diaphragm into your vagina upwards and backwards. This should ensure that the diaphragm covers your cervix.

If your cervix isn't covered, take the diaphragm out by

hooking your finger under the rim or loop (if there is one) and pulling downwards, then try again.

You might squat, lie down, or stand with one foot up on a chair while putting your diaphragm in. Choose the position that's easiest for you.



How do I put a cap in?

For the cap to be effective it needs to cover your cervix. It's helpful to feel your cervix before inserting the cap (see below).

Caps come with instructions and a doctor or nurse will show you how to put it in. The different types of cap are all used in a similar way.

Fill one-third of the cap with spermicide, but don't put any spermicide around the rim as this will stop the cap from staying in place. Caps have a groove between the dome and the rim; some spermicide should also be placed there.

Squeeze the sides of the cap together and hold it between your thumb and first two fingers. The cap must fit neatly over your cervix. It stays in place by suction. Always check that your cervix is covered. Depending on the type of cap, you may

need to add extra spermicide after it's been put in.

How do I find my cervix?

You can find your cervix by inserting a clean finger into your vagina until you touch the top and can't go any further. The cervix feels like the end of your nose.

How do I take my diaphragm or cap out?

Leave your diaphragm or cap in for at least six hours after the last time you had sex. You can leave it for longer, but not for more than the recommended time. For the diaphragm this is usually 24 hours. For the cap, this is usually 48 hours including the minimum six. Check the instructions for more information. Take it out by gently hooking your finger under the rim, loop or strap and pulling downwards.



How do I look after my diaphragm or cap?

When you take your diaphragm or cap out, wash it in warm water with a mild, unperfumed soap. Rinse it thoroughly. Dry it carefully and keep it in its container in a cool, dry place. Never boil your diaphragm or cap, never use disinfectant or detergent to clean it or use talcum powder with it. Don't use silicone-based or oil-based products or lubricants with a diaphragm or cap as these could damage it. Water-based lubricants are safe to use.

Check your diaphragm or cap regularly for tears or holes by holding it up to the light and having

a good look at it. Be careful with your fingernails and jewellery. If your diaphragm goes out of shape, squeeze it gently back into its circular shape. Your diaphragm or cap may become discoloured. Don't worry, this won't make it less effective.

Can I use my diaphragm or cap during my period?

Avoid using a diaphragm or cap during your period as it might increase your risk of getting an infection called toxic shock syndrome.

Can I have a bath when I've got my diaphragm or cap in?

No. Water may dislodge it or wash away the spermicide. Put your diaphragm or cap in after a bath, rather than before, and have a shower instead of a bath during the six hours after you've had sex, when you need to keep your diaphragm or cap in.

The effect of swimming or water sports hasn't been studied, but it's likely to be small.

Can I practice using my diaphragm or cap?

Practicing using your diaphragm or cap gives you time and privacy to find out if the method's suitable for you and to learn how to use it properly. While you're learning to use it, don't rely on it to stop you getting pregnant. Use an additional method of contraception if you have sex.

Try putting the diaphragm or cap in and check that it covers your cervix. You can have sex with the diaphragm or cap in place and leave it in for a few hours to find out if it's comfortable for you and a partner. It's also a good idea to use the

spermicide to see how this feels.

If you want to get your diaphragm or cap checked by a doctor or nurse, wear the diaphragm or cap so the doctor or nurse can check that you've put it in properly and that it's the right size.

How often do I need to see a doctor or nurse?

Once you have a diaphragm or cap that you're happy with, you only need to see a doctor or nurse to replace it or if you have any questions or concerns. You may need a different size diaphragm or cap if you gain or lose more than 3kg (7lb) in weight, or if you've recently been pregnant.

How do I find out about contraception services?

The National Sexual Health Helpline provides confidential advice and information on all aspects of sexual health. The number is 0300 123 7123. It's open Monday to Friday from 9am-8pm.

For more information on sexual health visit www.fpa.org.uk or www.sexwise.org.uk

Information for young people can be found at www.brook.org.uk

Clinics

To find your closest clinic you can:

- use Find a Clinic at www.fpa.org.uk/clinics
- download FPA's Find a Clinic app for iPhone or Android.

Details of general practices and pharmacies in England are at www.nhs.uk and in Wales at www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk. In Scotland, details of general practices are at www.nhsinform.scot and in Northern Ireland at www.hscni.net

Emergency contraception

If you've had sex without contraception, or think your method might've failed, there are different types of emergency contraception you can use.

- An IUD is the most effective option. It can be fitted up to five days after sex, or up to five days after the earliest time you could've ovulated (released an egg).
- An emergency contraceptive pill with the active ingredient ulipristal acetate can be taken up to five days (120 hours) after sex. It's available with a prescription or to buy from a pharmacy. ellaOne is the only brand in the UK.
- An emergency contraceptive pill with levonorgestrel can be taken up to three days (72 hours) after sex. It's available with a prescription or to buy from a pharmacy. There are different brands.

Try and get emergency contraception as soon as possible after unprotected sex.

Emergency pills are available for free from some pharmacies. Age restrictions may apply.

Sexually transmitted infections

Most methods of contraception don't protect you from sexually transmitted infections.

External (male) and internal (female) condoms when used correctly and consistently, can help protect against sexually transmitted infections. If you can, avoid using spermicidally lubricated condoms. The spermicide commonly contains a chemical called Nonoxinol 9, which may increase the risk of HIV infection.

A final word

This booklet can only give you general information. The information is based on evidence-guided research from The Faculty of Sexual and Reproductive Healthcare of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists and the World Health Organization.

All methods of contraception come with a Patient Information Leaflet which provides detailed information about the method.

Contact your doctor, practice nurse or a sexual health clinic if you are worried or unsure about anything.



the sexual health charity



sexwise.org.uk

www.fpa.org.uk

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If you'd like information on the evidence used to produce this booklet or would like to give feedback email feedback@fpa.org.uk

