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Cervical Cap

What is a Cervical Cap?

A cervical cap is a latex, thimble-shaped device that is inserted into the vagina and fits snugly over the cervix. Suction keeps the cap in place. A cervical cap provides a barrier to block sperm from entering the uterus and prevents fertilization. After intercourse, it should be left in place for 8 hours. A cervical cap is used with spermicidal jellies or creams that kill sperm. As birth control, cervical caps are 80-91% effective for women who have never given birth. They are 60-74% effective for women who have given birth. Cervical caps offer limited protection against reproductive tract infections, but do not protect against HIV/AIDS.

Use

The effectiveness of a cervical cap depends on its fit. Cervical caps come in different sizes to fit different women. A fitting is done in a clinic. When you are first fitted for the cap, your medical practitioner will show you how to insert the cap.

A cervical cap can stay in place for 48 hours. Practice inserting and removing your cervical cap before sex play with a partner. It can be awkward at first, but becomes easy with practice. Cervical caps are not recommended during menstrual periods.

Insertion

Prepare the cervical cap by filling it about one-third full with spermicide. Be careful not to spread spermicide on the rim. Too much spermicide may cause the cap to slip off your cervix. If you are having oral sex, you can wipe excess spermicide off your vulva. Spermicides can have a bad taste.

To insert the cap, find a comfortable position. Try standing with one foot raised on a chair, sitting with knees apart, or lying down with knees bent. Use one hand to separate your lips. The other hand can squeeze the rim of your cervical cap and insert the cap far inside your vagina. Use a finger to push it over your cervix. You can run your finger around the cap's rim to make sure the cervix is covered. Test the

suction of your cap by gently pinching and pulling on it. You should feel some resistance.

Removal

After intercourse, wait 8 hours before removing your cervical cap. You can use one finger to release the suction at the rim then pull the cap out of your vagina. If you have trouble reaching the cap, try squatting and bearing down.

Awareness

The highest risk of pregnancy occurs during the first few months women use cervical caps. To increase effectiveness during these months and every time you have a new partner, check the position of your cap before and after intercourse to make sure that it stays in place. If the cap moved during intercourse, consider using Emergency Contraception.

Care

Do not douche or use oil-based lubricants with the cervical cap in place. Douching weakens the spermicide and oil-based lubricants, like Vaseline or edible oils, may damage the cap. After use, wash the cap with mild soap and warm water. You can prevent odors by soaking your cervical cap in diluted lemon juice and drying your cap between uses. To make sure the cap stays effective, regularly check the condition of the cap. You can hold it up to the light or fill it with water to check for holes.

Refitting

Giving birth or having an abortion can affect the way a cervical cap fits. After a birth or an abortion, it is recommended that women have a medical provider check the fit of their cervical cap.

Your Health

Cervical caps are not recommended for women who have had Toxic Shock Syndrome.



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Side Effects

Some women may experience allergic reactions to the rubber of the cervical cap or the spermicide they use. If this happens and your spermicide has nonoxynol-9, try a spermicide without this chemical.

Advantages

- Can be inserted many hours before sex play.
- Easy to carry around, comfortable.
- Does not alter the menstrual cycle.
- Does not affect future fertility.
- May help you better know your body.

Disadvantages

- Does not protect against HIV/AIDS.
- Requires a fitting in a clinic.
- Some women cannot be fitted.
- Can be difficult to insert or remove.
- Can be dislodged during intercourse.
- Possible allergic reactions.

Emergency Contraception

Pregnancy can be prevented *after* intercourse by taking Emergency Contraceptive pills (EC). Plan B and some brands of regular birth control pills can be used for EC. EC can be taken within 72 hours after unprotected intercourse to prevent pregnancy. It works by giving the body a short, high, burst of synthetic hormones that disrupts hormone patterns needed for pregnancy. In Washington State you can request EC directly from a pharmacist. To find the EC provider closest to you, call the nationwide **EC Hotline** at **1-800-584-9911**, 24 hours a day in English and Spanish or visit their website at www.NOT-2-LATE.com.

Your Cervix

The cervix is the opening to the uterus where menstrual blood, babies, and sperm pass. It is also the opening through which abortions are performed. Barrier methods of birth control, including the cervical cap, diaphragm, and female condom, work by covering the cervix and preventing sperm from entering the uterus. Hormonal methods of birth control, including oral contraceptives, Norplant, Depo Provera, and Lunelle, affect the mucus around the cervix and make the opening more resistant to sperm.

Women's bodies also naturally produce hormones that change the cervix during a menstrual cycle. You can learn more about your cervix using a speculum to perform a self-exam. For instructions and a speculum, ask your clinician or visit the FWHC website.

Further References

Feminist Women's Health Center: www.FWHC.org

Contraception and Sex Information You Can Actually Use: www.io.com/~wwwomen/contraception/

Reproductive Tract Infections, STDs and Beyond: www.sistersong1.org/sister-5.htm

Prentif (Manufacturer's Site): www.prentif.com

Birth Control Handbook. Montreal Health Press, 2000.

Our Bodies, Ourselves, for the New Century. Boston Women's Health Book Collective, 1998.

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