

# The Diaphragm

*A diaphragm is a dome-shaped rubber cap which is worn in the vagina during sexual intercourse to prevent pregnancy.*

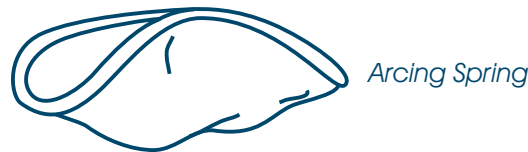
The three types of diaphragm available are arcing spring, coil spring and flat spring diaphragms. These are available in different sizes.



Flat Spring



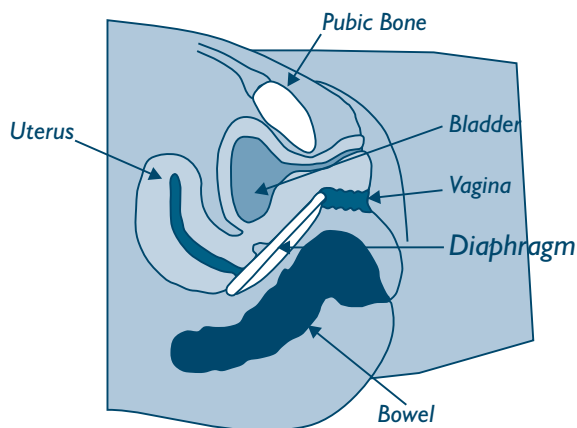
Coil Spring



Arcing Spring

## How does a diaphragm work?

The diaphragm fits inside the vagina and covers the cervix, acting as a barrier to stop sperm entering the uterus (womb).



Current research suggests that using spermicidal cream or jelly with the diaphragm offers no extra protection.

## How is the diaphragm used?

The diaphragm is inserted into the vagina before sexual intercourse. It must not be removed until at least 6 hours after sexual intercourse, as sperm can survive in the vagina for a number of hours.

It is not advisable to leave it in for more than 24 hours as this may lead to vaginal irritation and discharge.

During menstruation (periods), it should not be left in place longer than 12 hours.

## How effective is the diaphragm?

The diaphragm is 80-94% effective. The effectiveness of this method is higher with consistent and correct use of the diaphragm, experience in using it and correct fitting of the diaphragm. Effectiveness increases with experience.

## Are diaphragms suitable for all women?

Diaphragms may be well suited to women who:

- accept a higher risk of pregnancy
- want contraception only when required
- require an alternative to hormonal contraception (such as the Pill or DMPA), or intrauterine contraceptive devices (IUDs)

A diaphragm may not be suitable for women who:

- need highly effective protection against pregnancy
- suffer from recurrent urinary tract and/or vaginal infections

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- have poor muscle tone in the pelvic floor area
- have vaginal or uterine abnormalities or problems
- are unable to insert the diaphragm or feel the cervix
- have a history of toxic shock syndrome
- are allergic to latex

#### **What are the advantages of the diaphragm?**

- side effects are rare
- there is no delay in return to fertility
- it is an inexpensive method of contraception
- it does not inhibit spontaneity with sexual activity

#### **What are the possible side effects?**

- discomfort of vagina or penis due to irritation from latex or spermicides
- increased risk of urinary tract infections (related to incorrect size or fitting of diaphragm)
- toxic shock syndrome (this is rare)

#### **Where are diaphragms available?**

Diaphragms come in different types and sizes. It is important to be fitted for the one that suits you at a Family Planning Queensland (FPQ) clinic, or some health professionals. Instructions on how to put in and remove the diaphragm should be provided at the time of fitting.

Once the correct size and type are known, diaphragms may be bought from FPQ clinics and most chemists.

#### **When should a diaphragm be refitted?**

If the diaphragm is too small it may lead to incorrect insertion or it may move out of place

easily. If it is too big it will be uncomfortable. The size should be checked:

- 6 weeks after giving birth
- if there has been a weight gain or loss of around 5 kg or more
- if it is uncomfortable for the woman or her partner when it is in place
- when getting a new one

#### **How long does a diaphragm last?**

If the diaphragm is properly cared for it should last for a year or more.

After use, the diaphragm should be cleaned, rinsed, dried thoroughly and stored in a cool place. It should be checked regularly for any holes or signs of wear.

Avoid contact with oil-based products such as petroleum jelly (Vaseline) or baby oil, disinfectants, detergents, powders or perfumed soaps. These may weaken and damage the diaphragm.

Vaginal thrush treatments can also damage the latex in diaphragms and other barrier contraceptives like condoms.

#### **What if the diaphragm is dislodged or breaks during sex?**

If the diaphragm moves out of place or breaks, emergency contraception may be used to lower the risk of pregnancy. Emergency contraceptive pills are effective if taken up to 72 hours after unprotected sexual intercourse or, for some women, an IUD may be inserted as emergency contraception up to 5 days after unprotected sexual intercourse. Emergency contraception is more effective the earlier it is initiated. For more information see FPQ's Emergency Contraception fact sheet, or contact FPQ.