

# What you need to know about your diaphragm

**This handout provides information on the correct placement and use of the contraceptive diaphragm.**

Prepared by Dr Foran, Sexual Health Physician and Lecturer in the School of Women's and Children's Health, University of New South Wales, Randwick, Sydney, NSW.

## How do I insert it?

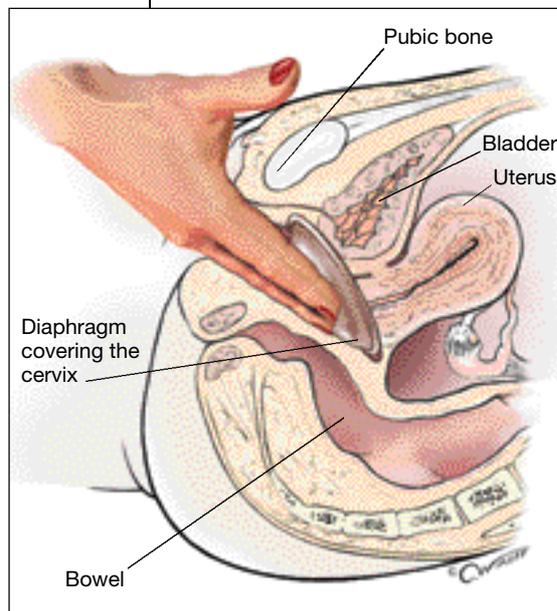
- Squeeze the sides of the rim together and slide the diaphragm into the vagina. Push the device upwards as far as it will go along the back wall of the vagina.
- Tuck the front of the rim of the diaphragm up behind the pubic bone.
- Check with your finger that the diaphragm covers your cervix, as shown in the Figure.

## How long do I leave it in?

- Leave the diaphragm in place for at least six hours after intercourse.
- Before removing the diaphragm, check that it is still covering the cervix. If it is not, or if you notice holes in the diaphragm after removing it, consider using emergency contraception as soon as possible. Emergency contraception is available from a pharmacist without a doctor's prescription. You may even want to keep some at home, just in case.
- Do not leave a diaphragm in place for longer than 24 hours without removing and washing it. Some women prefer to leave the diaphragm in the vagina almost continuously, taking it out and washing it once a day. This is safe to do at any time except during menstrual bleeding when prolonged use may increase the risk of toxic shock syndrome. During menstrual bleeding, the diaphragm should be removed as soon as possible after the minimum six-hour post-intercourse period.

## How do I clean and store it?

- Wash the diaphragm in warm water, using mild soap. Rinse in clear water. There is no need to use special detergents or antiseptics to keep it clean.
- Dry it carefully, dust it with a little cornflour or cornstarch and store it in its box in a cool, dry place. (Cornflour is preferred to talcum powder because it has no preservatives or perfumes.)
- Buy a new diaphragm if the old one starts to feel sticky or tacky: this is a sign that the rubber has begun to perish.
- Check it regularly for holes by holding it up to the light and gently stretching it. The most common place for the rubber to perish is around the rim.



CHRIS WIKOFF, 2008

Figure. When you are inserting the diaphragm, make sure that its rim is tucked up behind the pubic bone and check with your finger that the diaphragm is covering the cervix.



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- Diaphragms should last about two years with proper care and average use. If you choose to use a diaphragm continuously, you may wish to alternate between two devices to extend their life spans.

### **What is the failure rate, and should I use a spermicide?**

- Failure rates for the diaphragm vary widely: anything from 6 to 25%. Failure of a diaphragm is dependent on many things, including the age of the woman, the fit and position of the diaphragm, and whether the diaphragm is used on every occasion.
- It has been suggested that the use of a spermicide may make the diaphragm more effective; however, spermicides also seem to increase the risk of vaginal and urinary tract infections. In most countries it is recommended that a small amount of spermicide be placed on the side of the diaphragm nearer the cervix. In Australia, it is more common to let the woman decide whether to use a spermicide. If you do decide to use a spermicide, make sure that the preparation is formulated for use with a diaphragm.

### **Will I need a different size at any stage?**

- You may need a different size of diaphragm as time goes by. Check the size of the diaphragm when your weight changes by more than 5 kg, after childbirth or vaginal surgery, and if the device becomes uncomfortable for either you or your partner.

### **Where can I obtain a diaphragm and how much does it cost?**

- Diaphragms may be ordered from a pharmacy or obtained directly from most family planning clinics. They usually cost between \$85 and \$120. MT



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