

## VAGINAL DIAPHRAGMS

### What is a diaphragm?

The diaphragm is a thin rubber dome with a circular spring around its edge, which is placed in the vagina to prevent pregnancy. There are several different sizes of diaphragms and it is necessary for you to be fitted with the right size. The great advantage is that the diaphragm is virtually free of side effects, is only used when needed, does not necessarily require partner co-operation and can be inserted well before intercourse begins.

### How does it work?

Normally after vaginal sex some sperm enters the uterus through the cervix to go along the tubes to where the egg is fertilised. A diaphragm prevents sperm from entering the cervix. If the sperm cannot enter the secretions of the cervix within a few hours after ejaculation, the normal acidity of the vagina kills the sperm.

### How effective is the diaphragm?

A pregnancy rate of 2% to 4% can be expected so, out of every 100 women using a diaphragm every time they have sex, 2 to 4 women will fall pregnant each year. Many women don't use the diaphragm every time, so failures may not only be due to the diaphragm itself, but also the failure to use it. The overall pregnancy rate, including both reasons is between 10 to 15%. The failure rate is primarily up to you. If you don't use the diaphragm every time, then it may be wise to consider another method.

### When do I need to insert the diaphragm?

The diaphragm can be inserted either just before penetration, at the beginning of intercourse, before you go out in the evening, or worn for 24 hours continuously. You need to work out what is the right timing for you. The diaphragm should not be left in for more than 24 hours continuously because of the risk of infection. But you can remove it and wash it and reinsert it immediately if you wish.

### How long should I keep the diaphragm in after intercourse?

If you have sex several times in one night, leave it in for 6 to 8 hours after the last time.

### Do I need to use spermicide?

A spermicide does not actually increase the effectiveness of the diaphragm. Some people find spermicide is messy and of an unpleasant taste. If this discourages you from using the diaphragm, it is far better to use the diaphragm without a spermicide than to have unprotected intercourse.

If you do intend to use spermicide then you should use cream in preference to jelly. Place about a 3cm strip on the 'upper' surface only of the diaphragm. (that is the surface that faces upwards) and spread it evenly over the dome. Don't spread the cream onto the rim as it may cause the diaphragm to dislodge. Don't take the diaphragm out until 6 to 8 hours after the last intercourse for any reason, even to place more spermicide on it (spermicide lasts 24 hours).

### Will my partner feel the diaphragm?

Yes, most can feel the diaphragm while having sex. Men (and women) do not complain of loss of sensation like they do with condoms. Remember there is still plenty of genital skin-on-skin contact with sex when a diaphragm is used. It is rare for a man to actually complain about the feeling.

### Will I feel the diaphragm?

As a general rule, women cannot tell whether they have their diaphragm in or not. That is, they cannot feel it. If a diaphragm is too large, you may feel a dull pelvic ache after it has been in for more than an hour.

### What happens if I forget to use the diaphragm?

If for whatever reason you have unprotected intercourse, you may be at risk of falling pregnant. If this unprotected sex occurred in the fertile time in your cycle, you have a high chance of falling pregnant. The "Morning After" pill will greatly reduce your chance of falling pregnant. It may be a good idea to take a supply of 'Morning After' pills with you.

### How do I care for my diaphragm?

The diaphragm should be washed after each use in warm soapy water. It can then be placed wet or dry, in its case. It doesn't need a drying powder. Don't use oils, petroleum jelly (vaseline) or talc and don't expose it to direct sunlight.

### How do I replace my diaphragm?

Your diaphragm should be replaced every 1 to 2 years. When it is getting too old it will either pit, become sticky or tear. Diaphragms can be obtained from any chemist.

### Does a diaphragm protect me from sexually transmitted infections?

No. This protection is not 100% but it is effective in reducing the chances of an STI. When you use a diaphragm, there is still an exchange of fluids and therefore it is not considered 'Safe Sex'. A diaphragm will not protect you against HIV.