



The Cervical Cap

What is it?

The cervical cap is a small latex rubber cup that fits over the cervix and stays in place by suction. It is similar to the diaphragm.

How does it work?

The cervical cap acts as physical barrier that blocks the passage of sperm from the vagina into the uterus. Since a small amount of spermicide is placed inside the cap, it also acts as a chemical method of contraception. When spermicide comes in contact with sperm, it kills the sperm before they enter the uterus.

How effective is it?

How well the cap prevents pregnancy depends on whether it is used *correctly and consistently*. When used correctly with every act of intercourse, the cap can be a highly effective method of contraception. If used perfectly, the failure rate may be as low as 6% per year. However, in typical users the failure rate can be as high as 18% per year.

If you think you may be at risk for sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) or the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), which causes AIDS, insist that your partner use a latex condom to help protect you against infection.

What are the benefits?

The cervical cap offers several benefits. The cap is inserted in advance of intercourse to allow for spontaneity. There is no need to add additional spermicide into the vagina for repeated acts of intercourse. Unlike hormonal methods of contraception, the cap has no systemic effects. Although initially some women find it difficult to insert or remove, with practice most women find it gets easier. The cap should be left in place for at least 8 hours after intercourse and can be left in place for up to 48 hours, but no longer; it is recommended that the diaphragm be left in place for 6 hours after intercourse and removed soon after that.

Are there any risks?

There are few risks associated with the cervical cap. However, some women experience discomfort while using it. Some women and men are allergic to spermicide. These women may experience vaginal or cervical irritation; their partners may experience penile irritation. Some women note an odor.

Do I have to see my health care provider to get the cervical cap?

The cap comes in four different sizes and requires a medical prescription, so you must see your doctor or a nurse practitioner for a consultation and fitting. Not all clinicians have been trained to fit the cap. Ask if your clinician has prescribed this method. After childbirth, women should be refitted. Also, there are some women who have a cervix that does not fit one of the available sizes.

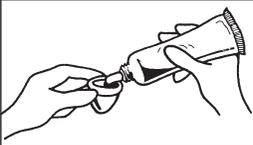
Who should use it?

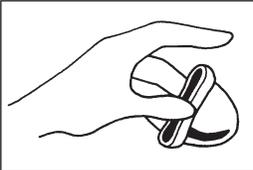
Women who like a barrier method and who will use it consistently may like the cervical cap. Some women who are unable to use a diaphragm (those with uterine prolapse or vaginal relaxation) can use the cap. Women should be prepared to accept the risk of failure (6-18%), which is higher than that of hormonal methods. Some women should avoid the cap, including those who are allergic to rubber (latex). Ask your health care provider about using the cap and about other methods of contraception.

USING THE CAP

Preparing to insert the cap...

1. Before inserting the cap, empty your bladder.
2. After washing your hands, use your first two fingers to locate your cervix. It feels like the tip of your nose. To locate the cervix try squatting, lying down or standing up with one leg up on a stool. If you have difficulty, try bearing down as though you are having a bowel movement.

3.  Fill cap 1/3 full with spermicidal cream or jelly.

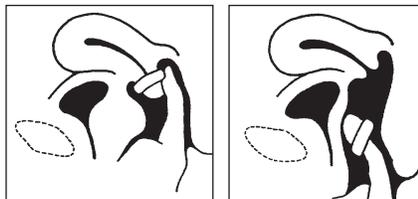
4.  Fold cap and hold between the fingers of one hand. Gently part lips of the vagina and insert cap into the vagina.

5.  While pinching the sides of the cap together, reach back and place cap on the cervix.

6.  Check placement of the cap with index and middle finger. The cervix should be completely covered by the cap. The dome should feel soft with some dimpling.

7. Feel the cervix underneath the dome. Press gently on the dome to apply suction and seal it. Next, spin the cap one quarter turn to increase the seal.

Removing the cap...



To remove the cap, tip the side with the index finger to break the seal, then gently pull cap down and out.

Remember...

1. Before inserting the cap, always feel for the cervix.
2. The cap should be inserted prior to intercourse.
3. Leave the cap in place for 8 hours after intercourse, but no longer than 48 hours.
4. Until you become comfortable and familiar with inserting the cap correctly (usually 1 week to 1 month), use a backup method of contraception (eg, condoms or extra spermicide after the cap is inserted).
5. To prevent pregnancy, the cervical cap must be used with each act of intercourse.

Care and Storage

After each use, turn the cap inside out and use a mild soap and warm water to wash it. Dry the cap thoroughly and store in its container, at room temperature.