

# Sexual Health

## DIAPHRAGMS/CERVICAL CAPS



May 2010

Diaphragms and cervical caps are similar devices that are used with a spermicide to prevent pregnancy. These methods are positioned into the vagina and over the cervix before sexual intercourse. The diaphragm is 84 – 94% effective in preventing pregnancy. Cervical caps are 68-74% effective for women who have given birth and 84 – 91% effective for women who have not given birth.

Diaphragms and cervical caps do not protect against sexually transmitted infections (STI).

### *How to they work?*

- The diaphragm is a latex or silicone dome with a flexible ring around its edge.
- The cervical cap is a thimble-shaped silicone cap.
- When positioned properly, they block the entry to the uterus so sperm cannot enter and fertilize an egg.
- Spermicide must be used with caps and diaphragms to chemically impair the sperm.
- A health care provider measures the cervix and prescribes a properly sized diaphragm or cervical cap.

- Diaphragm/cervical caps have to be replaced after approximately one to two years.
- Spermicide should be reapplied for each act of intercourse.

### *Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI) Protection*

The diaphragm or cervical cap do not protect against STIs. Use a separate condom, dental dam, latex glove for each sex act.

### *Advantages*

- No hormones.
- Can be used by breastfeeding mothers.
- Diaphragm can be used during menstrual periods. Cervical caps cannot.
- Can be inserted several hours before intercourse.

### *Considerations*

- Must be available at the time of intercourse.
- Must be left in place for 6-8 hours after last intercourse.
- Diaphragm may increase the risk of urinary tract infections.
- Requires a high level of motivation to use consistently and correctly.
- Both diaphragm and cap may become dislodged during intercourse.
- Diaphragm and cap may have to be refitted if a woman gains or loses more than 5-10 lbs and after a pregnancy.
- Must be cleaned with warm soapy water and rinsed thoroughly between each use.

Adapted with permission from the Middlesex London Health Unit.