

## Barrier Methods of Birth Control

Let's begin with the condom or prophylactic. (Sometimes you'll hear it referred to as a rubber.) This is simply a thin sheath that covers the penis and prevents sperm from entering the vagina by blocking it. Condoms used with a spermicidal foam, cream, or jelly are about 95 percent effective in preventing pregnancy. Used without a spermicide, condoms are about 88 percent effective. And spermicides used without a condom are only about 79 percent effective. It's important to note that a spermicidal foam must be inserted into the woman's vagina before intercourse to work properly, and its effectiveness only lasts about an hour after insertion. Spermicidal suppositories are also available, but these tend to not work as well because they don't always dissolve in the vagina.

To be effective, the condom must be put on an erect penis before any contact with the vagina. It must be adequately lubricated and not pulled too tightly, to prevent tearing. Also, the penis must be withdrawn soon after orgasm, before it becomes smaller, in order to prevent sperm from escaping as the condom loosens. Condoms with reservoir tips offer the best protection.

Condoms and spermicidal foams, creams, and jellies can be purchased without a prescription in almost any drugstore. To protect against sexually transmitted diseases as well as pregnancy, use latex condoms and a spermicide containing nonoxynol-9.

A diaphragm and cervical cap are also considered to be barrier methods for birth control, although both are not very effective for protecting against sexually transmitted diseases. A diaphragm is a soft rubber dome that covers the opening to the uterus and should be used along with a spermicidal cream or jelly. Used properly, a diaphragm is about 82 percent effective in preventing pregnancy. A cervical cap is simply a mini-diaphragm that fits right over the cervix and relies on suction to stay in place. It, too, is about as effective as a diaphragm in preventing pregnancy. Both diaphragms and cervical caps need to be fitted by a medical professional, however.

Once the diaphragm or cervical cap has been individually fitted by a medical professional, it must be properly inserted before intercourse, with spermicidal foam, cream, or jelly, and then left in place for six to eight hours after intercourse. When properly inserted, a diaphragm is generally not felt by either partner. If you have intercourse again, more spermicidal foam, cream, or jelly must be inserted without removing the diaphragm or cervical cap. Make sure that you replace it every two or three years, and get it refitted if you gain or lose more than 20 pounds. You should also replace it if it causes discomfort, if you have a pregnancy, or if you have any pelvic surgery.

If you want to be fitted for a diaphragm or cervical cap, call your doctor or medical professional. If you're no longer comfortable with a barrier method of birth control—perhaps because you don't feel they're effective enough for you or because you or your partner has an allergic reaction to spermicides—ask your medical professional about other birth control methods.

\* \* \* \* \*

**For more health information ...**

- Connect to our Web site at *members.kp.org*
- Check your *Kaiser Permanente Healthwise Handbook*.
- Listen to the Kaiser Permanente Healthphone at 1-800-332-7563. For TTY, call 1-800-777-9059.
- Visit your facility's Health Education Department for books, videos, classes, and additional resources.

This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other medical professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor.

If you have questions or need more information about your medication, please speak to your pharmacist.