

Preventing pregnancy- condoms and diaphragms

In the last few SPEAK's we talked about the pill and the injection as ways of preventing pregnancy. In this issue we look at 'barrier' methods . Barrier methods prevent pregnancy and also help to prevent the spread of sexually transmitted diseases

Diaphragms and condoms are barrier methods of preventing pregnancy. They prevent the man's sperm from reaching the woman's egg. In this way, pregnancy is prevented. Barrier methods of contraception do not have any harmful side-effects. They put the control of prevention back in the hands of people.

What is a diaphragm?

The diaphragm is a contraceptive used by women. It is used with a spermicidal jelly. The diaphragm is made of soft, thin rubber. It is shaped like a cup, with a ring around the rim. The ring can be pushed together to change its shape so it can slide into the vagina and be pushed to the neck of the womb. It acts as a barrier to prevent sperm from swimming into the womb. The spermicidal jelly helps to kill sperm. It has no harmful side-effects.

Using a diaphragm

A woman who uses a diaphragm must put it in before she has sex. Before putting it in she

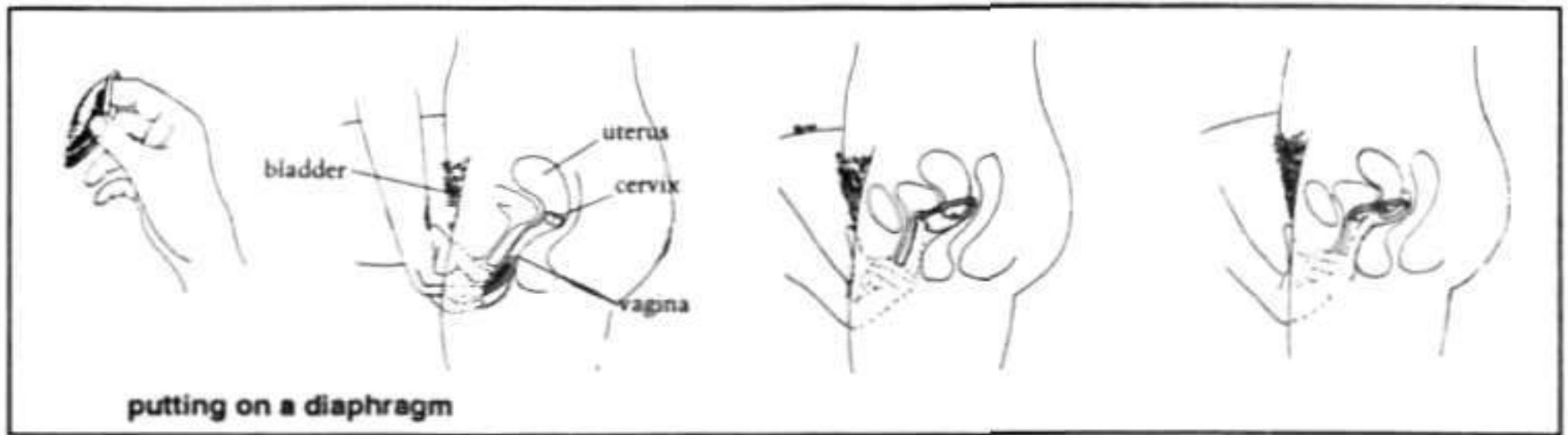
smears spermicidal jelly on both sides of the diaphragm. She then uses her fingers to squeeze the diaphragm into a narrow shape that will slide into the vagina. She pushes it to the top of her vagina and lets go of it there. The rim of the diaphragm opens up, and covers the cervix, which is the neck of the womb.

How does the diaphragm work?

When a woman and man have sex the diaphragm prevents the sperm that swims up the vagina from passing up into the womb. The spermicidal jelly kills off the sperm. A woman can put the diaphragm in up to six hours before she has sex.

Taking the diaphragm out

The diaphragm must be left in for six hours after having sex. This is to make sure that sperm do not get into the womb. It is best to sit over the toilet, or to squat over a cloth when taking the diaphragm out. This is because quite a lot of fluid will come out with the diaphragm. The woman then hooks her finger around the rim of the diaphragm and it slips out.



Taking care of the diaphragm

A diaphragm can last for up to four years if it is carefully looked after. When it has been taken out after sex, wash it with soap and running water. Dry it off, shake a little powder, like baby powder, on it and put it back into its box until it is needed again. The powder and the box both help to protect the diaphragm and make it last longer. When you next use your diaphragm, first rinse the powder off with running water. It is a good idea to check that there are no holes in the diaphragm. When it looks as if it is getting thin in places, get a new one. If you are unsure, take the diaphragm to a chemist or health worker and ask.

How do you get a diaphragm?

Diaphragms are not easy to get. The government health clinics do not provide diaphragms. You can only get them from private doctors and some non-governmental clinics, like the Planned Parenthood Association which has a clinic in Johannesburg. The diaphragm has to be measured to fit the woman's cervix because not all women have the same size cervix. This is done by a trained health worker. The size of a woman's cervix also changes if she has a baby.

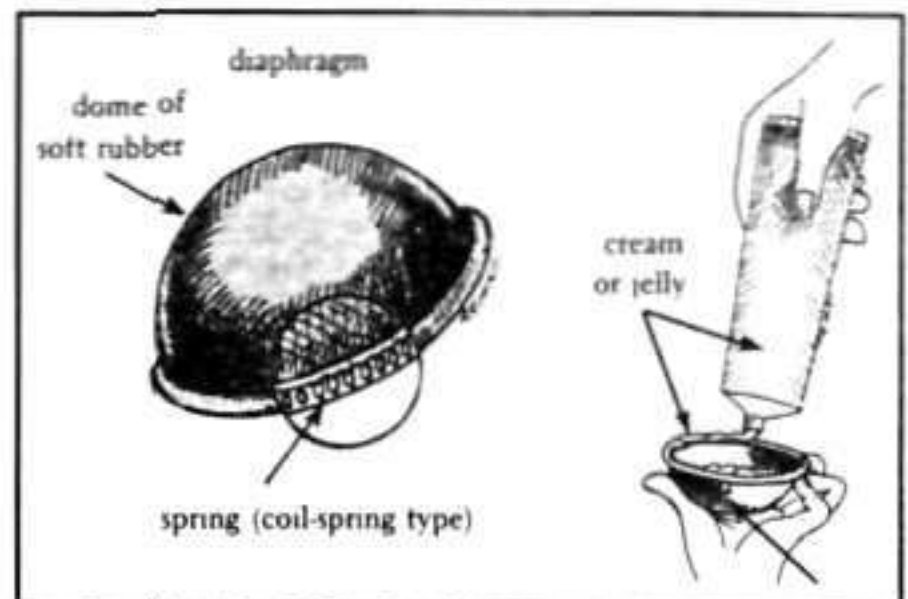
After the size of the diaphragm has been decided, the woman will be taught how to use it properly. She will be shown how to put it in and take it out. She will be shown how to check that the neck of the womb is properly covered. She will learn to know how the diaphragm feels when it is properly fitted.

How safe is a diaphragm?

If a diaphragm is properly used it is 95% safe in preventing pregnancy. In other words, about five out of every hundred women who use a diaphragm over a year get pregnant because the diaphragm fails.

How much does a diaphragm cost?

If you get a diaphragm from a doctor it will cost about R160.00, including the cost of the visit to the doctor. The contraceptive jelly will cost about R25.00. The Planned Parenthood Association (PPA) runs a clinic in Johannesburg. They charge R65.00 for a diaphragm and R14.00 for spermicidal jelly. Remember that this diaphragm, if carefully looked after can last for up to four years. Government family planning clinics give spermicidal jellies free of charge. A tube of spermicidal jelly will be enough for about ten or twelve times of having sex.



Graphics : from Our Bodies Ourselves