



## CERVICAL CAP (or cervical cover)

### What is a Cervical Cap?

A cervical cap or cover is a device you insert into your vagina that fits over your cervix. Suction keeps it in place. It provides a barrier to block sperm from entering the uterus. A cap is used with spermicidal gel or cream which you put into the cup before inserting it into your body. As birth control, cervical caps are 84 to 91 percent effective for women who have never given birth. They are 68 to 74 percent effective for women who have given birth. Cervical caps offer limited protection against sexually transmitted infections, but do not protect against HIV/AIDS. Femcap is the only cervical cap currently available in the USA.

### Use

The effectiveness of a cervical cap depends on its fit. Cervical caps come in different sizes to fit different women. A fitting is done in a clinic. When you are first fitted, your medical practitioner will show you how to insert and remove it. A cervical cap can stay in place for 48 hours so that you can put it in far in advance of sexual activity. Practice inserting and removing your cervical cap before sex play with a partner. It becomes easy with practice. Cervical caps are not recommended during menstrual periods.

### Insertion

Prepare the cervical cap by filling it about one-third full with spermicide. Be careful not to spread spermicide on the rim. Too much spermicide may cause the cap to slip off your cervix. If you are having oral sex, you can wipe excess spermicide off your vulva to prevent one from tasting it.

To insert the cap, find a comfortable position. Try standing with one foot raised on a chair, sitting with knees apart, or lying down with knees bent. Use one hand to separate your lips. The other hand can squeeze the rim of your cervical cap and insert the cap far inside your vagina. Use a finger to push it over your cervix. You can run your finger around the cap's rim to make sure the cervix is covered. Test the suction of your cap by gently pinching and pulling on it. You should feel some resistance.

### Removal

After intercourse, wait eight hours before removing your cervical cap. You can use one finger to release the suction at the rim then pull the cap out of your vagina. If you have trouble reaching the cap, try squatting and bearing down.

### Awareness

The highest risk of pregnancy occurs during the first few months women use cervical caps. To increase effectiveness during these months and every time you have a new partner, check the position of your cap before and after intercourse to make sure that it stays in place. If the cap moved during intercourse, consider using Emergency Contraception.

### Care

Do not douche or use oil-based lubricants with the cervical cap in place. Douching weakens the spermicide; Oil-based lubricants (like Vaseline or edible oils) may damage the cap. After use, wash the cap with mild soap and warm water. You can prevent odors by soaking your cervical cap in diluted lemon juice and drying your cap between uses. To make sure the cap stays effective, regularly check the condition of the cap. You can hold it up to the light or fill it with water to check for holes.

### Refitting

Giving birth or having an abortion can affect the way a cervical cap fits. After a birth or an abortion, it is recommended that women have a medical provider check the fit of their cervical cap.

### Advantages and Disadvantages

#### Advantages

- ◆ Can be inserted many hours before sex play.
- ◆ Easy to carry around, comfortable.
- ◆ Does not alter the menstrual cycle.
- ◆ Does not affect future fertility.
- ◆ May help you better know your body.

### Disadvantages

- ◆ Does not protect against HIV/AIDS.
- ◆ Requires a fitting in a clinic.
- ◆ Not able to fit with all women.
- ◆ Can be difficult to insert or remove.
- ◆ Can be dislodged during intercourse.
- ◆ Poses a danger of possible allergic reactions.

### Your Health

Cervical caps are not recommended for women who have had Toxic Shock Syndrome.

### Side Effects

Some women may experience allergic reactions to the rubber of the cervical cap or the spermicide they use. If this happens and your spermicide has nonoxynol-9, try a spermicide without this chemical.

### Your Cervix

The cervix is the opening to the uterus where menstrual blood, babies, and sperm pass. It is also the opening through which abortions are performed. Barrier methods of birth control, including the cervical cap, diaphragm, and female condom, work by covering the cervix and preventing sperm from entering the uterus. Hormonal methods of birth control, including oral contraceptives and Depo Provera, affect the mucus around the cervix and make the opening more resistant to sperm.

Women's bodies also naturally produce hormones that change the cervix during a menstrual cycle. You can learn more about your cervix using a speculum to perform a self-exam. For instructions and a speculum, ask your clinician or see the self-care section at [www.fwhc.org](http://www.fwhc.org). You may pick up a free speculum at Cedar River Clinics.

### Emergency Contraception

You can prevent pregnancy after unprotected intercourse by having a copper IUD inserted within one week of unprotected intercourse or by taking emergency contraception pills (the morning after pill). The pills work best in the first 24 to 48 hours but may work for several days. You can get one brand - Plan B - from your local pharmacy without a prescription if you are 17 years or older. If you are under 17 or if you want to use your insurance, you can get the prescription right at the pharmacy by talking with the pharmacist. Go to your local pharmacy to find out more, or call Cedar River Clinics at 800-572-4223 to get Plan B in Renton or Tacoma.

To find Emergency Contraception, see this website: [ec.princeton.edu](http://ec.princeton.edu). If you already have birth control pills in your possession, this website explains how to use them as emergency contraception.

Some women are buying Plan B in advance so they will have it on hand if they need it.

### Further Resources

- ◆ *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, [www.ourbodiesourselves.org](http://www.ourbodiesourselves.org)
- ◆ FemCap, [femcap.com](http://femcap.com)
- ◆ Cervical Barriers Advancement Society, [www.cervicalbarriers.org](http://www.cervicalbarriers.org)
- ◆ Feminist Women's Health Center, [www.FWHC.org](http://www.FWHC.org) and [www.Birth-Control-Comparison.info](http://www.Birth-Control-Comparison.info)