

# The Cervical Cap

## What is the Cervical Cap?

The cervical cap is a latex, dome-shaped device designed to fit snugly over the cervix. It is held in place by suction and support of the vaginal wall. Historically, caps have been made of metal, rubber, beeswax, etc., and are probably one of the oldest contraceptive devices. The cap is currently being used extensively in other countries, such as England. However it has now been approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for use as a contraceptive in the United States. To be fit for a cap, it is necessary to see a practitioner who is trained in the fitting of this device.

## How Does the Cap Work?

Like the diaphragm, the cap is a barrier which blocks passage of sperm from the vagina through the cervix into the uterus and tubes where they can fertilize the ripened egg. The fit is critical, so it is important to have a proper fit initially and then insert it correctly with every use. It is also critical to use a small amount of spermicide inside the cap. If spermicide is not used, the effectiveness of the cap is greatly reduced. The cap should NOT be left in longer than 48 hours so the body has a chance to excrete its natural cleansing mucous.

## How Effective is the Cap?

Recent studies confirm that the effectiveness of the cervical cap is similar to that of the diaphragm. Method failures (pregnancies) can be due to faulty techniques (i.e., incorrect placement, inconsistent use, no spermicide). There is a small chance of failure, however, as with any contraceptive method, even when correctly used. For "perfect" users, the cap can be 96% effective. The most common cause of failure is dislodgement of the cap from the cervix during intercourse.

## What Are the Advantages of the Cap?

- Uses less spermicide than the diaphragm.
- Can be left in up to 48hrs.
- Rarely causes cramping or changes in menses.
- Not a systemic form of contraceptive-does not affect other body functions as with the pill.
- Not associated with increased pelvic infections or irregular bleeding as with the IUD. May in fact decrease risk of some sexually transmitted diseases (similar to the diaphragm).
- Good alternative for women who cannot use the diaphragm due to poor vaginal muscle tone or a history of chronic bladder infections.
- Does not interfere with sexual spontaneity as with other barrier methods.

### What Are the Disadvantages of the Cervical Cap?

- Sometimes more difficult to insert and remove than the diaphragm.
- Can be dislodged from the cervix during intercourse without one's awareness.
- The firm rim can sometimes be irritating to your partner.
- A mal odor can occur.
- Device is not appropriate for all types of cervix (size, shape, position, and texture are all determining factors in the fit).

### Are There Serious Side Effects?

- Cervical edema.
- Cervicitis (inflammation or irritation of the cervix).
- The effect of suction on the cervix.
- The effect of two days contact of spermicide on the cervix.

### Who Should Not Use the Cervical Cap?

Women who should not use the cervical cap include those who have:

- An usually long or short cervix.
- History of cervical lacerations.
- Previous cone biopsy of the cervix.
- Current cervicitis.
- An usually shaped cervix.
- Current pelvic, tubal or ovarian infection.
- Current vaginal infection.
- An abnormal or unresolved Pap smear.