

What Is It?

The cervical cap is a small plastic dome that fits tightly over the cervix and stays in place by suction. It is used with spermicide. It is made of silicone (not latex). The type available in the United States comes in three sizes. A health care professional can determine which size is best for you.

How Does It Work?

The cervical cap acts as a barrier to prevent sperm from entering the cervix and uterus. The spermicide used with it inactivates sperm.

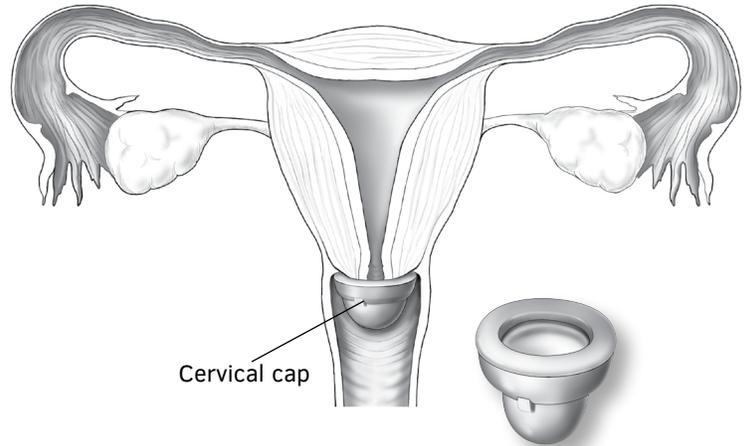
How Do I Use It?

There are three basic steps for use of the cervical cap:

1. Apply spermicidal cream or jelly inside the cap.
2. Squeeze the cap between your fingers and insert it into the vagina. Press the cap onto your cervix until it is completely covered.
3. Check to see if your cervix is covered before and after each act of sex. To do this, press on the dome of the cap.

The cap should be left in place for 6 hours after sex but for no more than 48 hours total. If you have sex more than once in this time frame, you do not need to reapply spermicide.

The cervical cap can be reused for up to 2 years. After each use, wash it with mild soap and warm water and let it air dry.



Benefits

- It has no effect on a woman's natural hormones.
- It can be used while breastfeeding beginning 6 weeks after childbirth. But it is less effective in women who have given birth.
- It can be inserted up to 40 hours before sex.

Risks

- There is an increased risk of toxic shock syndrome (TSS). To reduce this risk, do not use during your menstrual period.
- Frequent use of spermicides can increase the risk of getting HIV from an infected partner. Use birth control methods that contain spermicide only if you are at low risk of HIV infection.
- Using a cervical cap and spermicide may increase the risk of urinary tract infections (UTIs).

Possible Side Effects

- Allergic reaction to spermicide
- Vaginal irritation or odor

Effectiveness of cervical cap compared to other methods	Highly effective
	Less effective
Protects against STIs, including HIV?	No
Effective right away?	Yes. Leave the cap in place for 6 hours after sexual intercourse but for no more than 48 hours total.
OK with breastfeeding?	Yes, beginning 6 weeks after childbirth. But it is less effective in women who have given birth.

*Abbreviations: HIV, human immunodeficiency virus; STIs, sexually transmitted infections.