The Real Female Rubber

November 1, 2001 By Lark Lands, PhD

What's old just might be new again if Nancy Padian, PhD, has her way. Before the Pill was invented, many women's birth control came in the form of a diaphragm -- a dome-shaped latex device that encircles the cervix and provides a physical barrier against sperm or infectious bugs -- combined with a sperm-zapping cream, gel or foam. Now, Padian, the director of international programs at the University of California at San Francisco's AIDS Research Institute, is pushing diaphragm-plus-HIV killing microbicide as female-controlled prevention. And this ladies' latex lets more pleasure in than the baggy female condom.

"The cervix is much thinner and more fragile than the vagina," Padian says. "It contains many more HIV receptors required for infection." She and her UCSF colleagues hope that with a diaphragm blocking the upward flow of virus into the more vulnerable cervix and uterus, a microbicide is a good bet to wipe out the HIV contained below. And given that a diaphragm-*cum*-spermicide has proved to be much more effective than *sans*, it's likely that combining a latex barrier with a microbicide could only help.

While Padian warns that no studies have proved that this works as well as good old condoms -- and, of course, effective microbicides are not yet available -- she urges that research burn rubber. "In too many parts of the world, women have no control over sex, and may be unable to suggest using condoms for fear of reprisals," she says. "A diaphragm can be used without a male partner knowing or needing to consent to its use."

And since diaphragms are hardy devices that can be re-used for months or even years, the microbicide would be the only ongoing expense. Take that, HIV -- and male chauvinists, too. Your days of causing needless infection may soon be over.

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.
http://beta.docker.poz.com/article/The-Real-Female-Rubber-1295-6564