

Abstract Submitted  
for the MAR06 Meeting of  
The American Physical Society

Sorting Category: 10.14.5 (C)

**Flexible polymers under spherical confinement** ANGELO CACCIUTO, ERIK LUIJTEN, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign — We compute the free energy of confinement  $\Delta F$  for a flexible self-avoiding polymer inside a spherical cavity. We find two different regimes depending on the degree of compression. For moderate confinement the free energy exhibits a power-law dependence on the diameter  $D$  of the cavity. At larger packing fraction  $\phi$ , however, the excluded-volume interactions between monomers dominate and the scaling law breaks down. We demonstrate that in the low density regime  $\beta\Delta F$  scales as  $(R_G/D)^{3/(3\nu-1)}$ , where  $R_G$  is the radius of gyration of the unconstrained polymer. This behavior differs from what is observed for confinement inside an infinitely long cylinder or between parallel plates,  $\beta\Delta F \sim (R_G/D)^{1/\nu}$ . On the basis of our results we revisit the problem of the escape through a hole of a spherically confined polymer and provide a corrected scaling prediction for the average escape time.

Prefer Oral Session  
 Prefer Poster Session

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Date submitted: 01 Dec 2005

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