

What You Should Know About ...

Spermicides

See Glossary section for definitions of underlined words.

What are spermicides?

- Spermicides are chemical substances that kill sperm to prevent pregnancy.
- The chemical substance is called nonoxynol-9.

What will spermicides do?

- They will prevent pregnancy 71-82 % of the time.
- They will work better when you:
 - use spermicides with male condoms (or other barrier methods like a diaphragm or cervical barriers)
 - use them every time you have vaginal intercourse.

How do I use a spermicide?

- You need to put the spermicide into your vagina before intercourse, read your product instructions.
- Do not have a tub bath or douche after intercourse. You need to leave the spermicide in for 6-8 hours after the last sexual intercourse so the spermicide has time to kill sperm. It's okay to shower.

What are the different types of spermicides?

Foam

- It comes in a container that you shake before using (it looks like hair mousse).
- Put the foam into an applicator and insert it into your vagina close to your cervix just before vaginal intercourse.
- If you have vaginal intercourse more than once, you will need to put in more foam each time you have sex.

Jelly

- It comes in a squeezable tube.
- Use it with the diaphragm and cervical barriers.

Vaginal Contraceptive Film (VCF)

- It is a small, very thin plastic-like square sheet that contains spermicide.
- Fold the VCF and insert it by hand into your vagina. It melts inside the vagina.
- Put the VCF in about 15 minutes before vaginal intercourse.
- If you have sex more than once, put a new film in each time.

Suppositories

- They are small oval pellets.
- You need to use your fingers and put one suppository in your vagina 15 minutes before vaginal intercourse.
- Put another one in for repeated intercourse.

Do spermicides protect me against STIs and HIV?

NO. Always use a latex condom or female condom when you have sex to reduce the risk of getting a sexually transmitted infection (STI), including HIV.

Are there any side effects in using spermicides?

- They can cause skin irritation.
- Do not continue using spermicides if you or your partner feel irritation; talk to your health care provider. Some research has found that using spermicides that contain nonoxynol-9 may increase the risk of getting HIV and sexually transmitted infections because it can cause skin irritations. The small tears in the skin and open areas of the skin can increase the chance of infection.

Where can I get spermicides?

- You don't need a doctor's prescription for spermicides. You can get them from the drugstore or grocery store.
- They can be expensive. You need to talk to your health care provider if cost is a problem.

Where can I get more information?

- From your health care provider, community health clinic, or public health nurse.
- From the Facts of Life On-Line: e-mail your questions to thefactsoflife@serc.mb.ca.

If this method fails, and if you don't want to get pregnant, see a health care provider or pharmacist for emergency contraception as soon as you can.

Glossary:

Cervix – The lower part of the uterus that opens into the vagina. It is also called the “neck of the uterus”.

Douche – Rinsing the vagina with water, water and vinegar, or a medicated solution. Health care providers do not recommend this practice as it often causes irritation.

Emergency Contraception – A method used to avoid pregnancy after sex, because a birth control method failed or was not used.

Sperm – The male reproductive cell; carried out of the penis in the semen during ejaculation

Vagina – The muscular tube inside a woman's body where the menstrual blood comes out from the uterus, where a baby comes out from the uterus during childbirth, and where a penis can go in for vaginal intercourse.