

# The Sponge

## What is the sponge?

- The sponge is a form of birth control. It is a disposable piece of soft foam filled with a chemical that kills sperm (spermicide).
- It is put in the vagina to cover the opening to the uterus (cervix) and helps prevent sperm from entering.

## How well does the sponge work?

- 8 to 9 out of 10 women will get pregnant in one year if having intercourse without birth control.
- With typical use (this means not following the exact directions and you may not use the sponge the right way) the sponge is **68 percent** effective.
- With perfect use (this means you follow the exact directions all the time) the sponge is **80 percent** effective.
- The sponge doesn't protect you from sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and HIV.
- Use a condom **every time** you have sex (vaginal, oral, anal) to lower your risk of STIs and HIV.

## How do I use the sponge?

- You can buy the sponge at a drugstore without a prescription.
- Carefully follow the **manufacturer's directions** for use that come with the product.
- You will have to touch your vagina to put in and take out the sponge.
- Put the sponge in and leave it in place for at least **6 hours after** your last intercourse.
- Don't keep the sponge in longer than **24 hours**, as there is a small risk of getting a very bad infection called toxic shock syndrome.

## What are the benefits of the sponge?

- You can put the sponge in several hours before you have sex.
- You can have sex more than once if you leave the sponge in place for at least **6 hours** after your last intercourse.
- The sponge doesn't have hormones and it doesn't affect a woman's natural hormones. It's a choice for women who can't use birth control methods with hormones.

## What are the disadvantages of the sponge?

- Vaginal spermicides can irritate you or your partner's genitals (e.g. itchiness, redness, or pain). This irritation **increases** your chance of getting STIs and/or HIV. If you have any genital irritation, don't use the sponge.
- If you leave the sponge in longer than the manufacturer recommends, there is a risk of a very bad infection called toxic shock syndrome.
- Some people might have an allergy to the chemicals in the sponge.
- Don't use the sponge in the first 6 weeks after having a baby.

## Did You Know

- You have the right to make the decision to have sex or not.
- Plan ahead and decide to protect yourself to lower your risk of pregnancy, STIs, and HIV.
- It is important to talk with your partner about how you can protect each other.
- Think about **emergency contraception** to help prevent pregnancy if your sponge moved out of place while you had sex or you have had unprotected sex.

## Websites

[www.myhealth.alberta.ca](http://www.myhealth.alberta.ca)

[www.sexualityandu.ca](http://www.sexualityandu.ca)

[www.teachingsexualhealth.ca](http://www.teachingsexualhealth.ca)

[www.albertahealthservices.ca](http://www.albertahealthservices.ca) and search for Sexual and Reproductive Health

For 24/7 nurse advice and general health information, call Health Link Alberta at 403-943-LINK (5465) in the Calgary area, 780-408-5465 in the Edmonton area, or 1-866-408-LINK (5465) toll-free.

---

*This material is for information purposes only. It should not be used in place of medical advice, instruction and/or treatment. If you have questions, speak with your doctor or appropriate healthcare provider.*