

# Vaginal Spermicides

## What are vaginal spermicides?

Vaginal spermicides are put in the vagina before sex to help prevent pregnancy. They contain an ingredient (nonoxynol 9) that kills sperm. When sperm comes in contact with a spermicide, the sperm dies and a woman can't get pregnant.

Spermicides come as film, foam, gel, cream, or suppositories.

## How well do vaginal spermicides 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) vaginal spermicides are **71 percent** effective.
- With perfect use (this means you follow the exact directions all the time) vaginal spermicides are **82 percent** effective.
- Spermicides work best to prevent pregnancy when used with another form of birth control (e.g., condoms).
- Spermicides don'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/HIV.

## How do I use vaginal spermicides?

- Always use vaginal spermicides with another form of birth control (e.g., condoms).
- Always use the right amount of spermicide (see package directions).
- Before using a spermicide, check the expiry date on the package. Don't use products that are expired.
- Put the spermicide up high in the vagina to cover the cervix.
- With some spermicide products, you have to wait before you have sex (see package directions).
- You have to put spermicide in **each time** you have sex.
- Don't rinse or douche for **at least 6 hours** after having sex (douching is not ever recommended).
- If you have questions about spermicides, talk to your pharmacist or healthcare provider.

## What are the benefits of vaginal spermicides?

- Anyone can buy spermicides; you don't need a prescription.
- Spermicides don't contain hormones, so they are good for women who can't use hormonal methods of birth control.
- Vaginal spermicides give you extra lubrication.

## What are the disadvantages of spermicides?

- 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 HIV. Don't use vaginal spermicides more than twice a day because it will increase your risk of genital irritation. If you have an irritated genital area, stop using spermicide and talk to your healthcare provider.
- Vaginal spermicides can be messy to use.
- Some people have allergies to spermicides.
- Using spermicides may increase your risk of a bladder infection, yeast infection, or bacterial vaginosis.

## 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.
- Natural vaginal spermicides might not be as effective. You can buy natural vaginal spermicides at some drugstores or online pharmacies. These spermicides are different than the ones described in this handout.

Think about getting **emergency contraception** to help prevent pregnancy if:

- you did **not** use the spermicide correctly
- you did **not** use another form of birth control with spermicide
- your other method of birth control failed (e.g., condom breaks)

## 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.

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