

SPERMICIDE



What is Spermicide?

A spermicide kills or disables sperm so that it cannot cause pregnancy. Spermicides come in many different forms: foam, jelly, cream, film, and suppositories. Most use the chemical nonoxynol-9 against sperm. Spermicides provide lubrication and can be used with other methods of birth control. They are most effective when used consistently and correctly with a barrier method of birth control, like a condom. Spermicides are 71-82% effective as birth control. Used alone, spermicide does not protect against HIV/AIDS.

Use

Spermicide can be used alone or with other birth control methods to reduce the risk of pregnancy. The lubrication it provides can increase pleasure. Insert your spermicide within a half hour before intercourse. Add more spermicide for repeated intercourse. Leave your spermicide in your vagina for 8 hours after the last act of intercourse and do not douche for 8 hours. Douching weakens spermicide. It is available in most drug stores and does not require a prescription.

Foam

Foam comes in a can and is the consistency of shaving cream. To use it, shake the can well. Place the applicator on the top of the can and press down or to the side, depending on the package directions. The plunger will rise as the applicator fills. Insert the applicator about two or three inches into your vagina and press the plunger to deposit the foam over your cervix. As you withdraw the applicator, be sure not to pull back on the plunger. This will suck some foam back into the applicator. It is effective immediately.

Creams and Jellies

Creams are opaque and jellies are clear. They can be inserted into the vagina with an applicator and/or rubbed over the penis. Cream or jelly is typically used with a diaphragm or cervical cap. It can also be used with condoms and is effective immediately.

Vaginal Contraceptive Film (VCF)

VCF comes in thin squares that dissolve over the cervix. To use it, fold the film in half and then place it on the tip of a finger. Insert your finger into your vagina and put the VCF over your cervix. A dry finger and quick insertion will help the VCF stay in place and not stick to your finger. It may take about 15 minutes for the VCF to melt and become effective.

Suppositories

Suppositories are capsules that dissolve in the vagina. They are inserted into the vagina like a tampon and pushed up to the cervix. It takes about twenty minutes for a suppository to become effective.

Sponges

The sponge is both a spermicide and a barrier method of birth control. As a barrier, it blocks sperm from entering the cervix and uterus which prevents fertilization. Most sponges are made out of polyurethane foam and are soft to the touch. To use, wet with a small amount of water and insert into the vagina with the dimple side facing up. Push the sponge up to the cervix making certain that it is completely covered. The sponge can be worn for up to 24 hours but must remain in place for 6 hours after intercourse to be effective as birth control.

Your Health

The vagina absorbs little spermicide. If you become pregnant while using spermicide, the pregnancy will not be affected.

Side Effects

You or your partner may be allergic to materials in spermicide. This can cause genital irritation, rash, or itchiness. If this happens and your spermicide has nonoxynol-9, try a spermicide without this chemical.

Advantages

- ◆ Available without a prescription.
- ◆ Lubrication may increase pleasure.
- ◆ Use can be part of sex play.
- ◆ Does not affect future fertility.

Disadvantages

- ◆ Does not protect against HIV/AIDS.
- ◆ Must be readily available and used prior to penetration.
- ◆ Can be messy.
- ◆ Can have a bad taste during oral sex.
- ◆ Possible genital irritation.
- ◆ When used frequently spermicides may irritate the vagina making it easier to catch HIV/STI

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Your Cervix

The cervix is the opening to the uterus where menstrual blood, babies, and sperm pass. It is also the opening through which abortions are performed. Spermicide and barrier methods of birth control, like the diaphragm, female condom, and cervical cap, work by covering the cervix and preventing sperm from entering the uterus. Hormonal methods of birth control, including oral contraceptives and Depo Provera, affect the mucus around the cervix and make the opening more resistant to sperm.

Women's bodies also naturally produce hormones that change the cervix during a menstrual cycle. You can learn more about your cervix using a speculum to perform a self-exam. For instructions and a speculum, ask your clinician or visit FWHC.org.

Emergency Contraception (The "Morning After" Pill – "Plan B" – "EC")

You can prevent pregnancy after sexual intercourse by taking Emergency Contraception pills (Plan B). Plan B works by giving the body a short burst of synthetic hormones that disrupt the hormone patterns needed for a pregnancy to start. Some types of regular birth control pills will work. Emergency Contraception is most effective 24-48 hours after unprotected intercourse but it can work for several days.

To find a clinic, doctor, or pharmacy close to you, call the nationwide Emergency Contraception Hotline at **1-800-584-9911**, 24 hours a day in English or Spanish (also at **1-888-NOT-2-LATE** and ec.princeton.edu).

If you already have birth control pills in your possession, ask the hotline how to use them as emergency contraception. Or call our clinics at **1-800-572-4223** and ask how to use the birth control pills you already have to prevent pregnancy after sex.

In Washington State you can get Plan B directly from your pharmacy regardless of what age you are. Call ahead to make sure they have it in stock and a trained person available to give it to you. In some states you must be age 18 or older to get Plan B directly from a pharmacy. Younger women need a prescription.

Some people are buying Plan B in advance so they will have it on hand if they need it.

Further Resources

- Contraception and Sex Information You Can Actually Use: www.io.com/~wwwomen/contraception/
- *Our Bodies, Ourselves*. Boston Women's Health Book Collective, 2005.
- Feminist Women's Health Center at www.FWHC.org and www.Birth-Control-Comparison.info
- Today Sponge: www.todaysponge.com (with webpages in Spanish and English)