

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. They're available in most drug stores and don't require a prescription. Most spermicides work via the chemical nonoxynol-9. They're most effective when used consistently and correctly with a barrier method of birth control, like a condom. Spermicides are 71 to 82% effective as birth control. Used alone, they don't 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. Then after the last act of intercourse, leave your spermicide in your vagina for eight hours and don't douche until after this time. Douching weakens spermicide.

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 Gels

Creams are opaque and gels are clear. They can be inserted into the vagina with an applicator and/or rubbed over the penis. Cream or gel 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 your 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're 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 a both a spermicide and a barrier method of birth control. As a barrier, it blocks sperm from entering the cervix and uterus, preventing 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 the cervix is completely covered. The sponge can be worn for up to 24 hours but must remain in place for six hours after intercourse to be effective as birth control.

Advantages and Disadvantages

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
- ◆ May irritate the vagina making it easier to catch HIV/STI when used very frequently

Your Health

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

Research indicates that spermicide increases the risk of HIV for sex workers when used frequently.

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.

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 contraceptive pills, Depo Provera shot, Implanon, Patch, and Ring affect the mucus around the cervix and make the opening more resistant to sperm.

Women's bodies 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

You can prevent pregnancy after unprotected intercourse by having a copper IUD inserted within one week of unprotected intercourse or by taking emergency contraception pills. The pills work best in the first 24 to 48 hours but may work for several days. You can get one brand, Plan B, from your pharmacy without a prescription if you are 17 years or older. If you are under 17 or if you want to use your insurance, you can also get a prescription.

To find Emergency Contraception, see this website: ec.princeton.edu. If you already have birth control pills in your possession, this website explains how to use them as emergency contraception.

In Washington State, you can get Plan B directly from your pharmacy. Call ahead to make sure they have it in stock. Some women are buying Plan B in advance (it costs around \$35-50) so they will have it on hand if they need it.

Further Resources

- ◆ *Our Bodies, Ourselves*. www.ourbodiesourselves.org
- ◆ www.avert.org - dedicated to averting HIV and AIDS
- ◆ Contraceptive Film at www.vcf-contraceptive.com
- ◆ Feminist Women's Health Center at www.FWHC.org and www.Birth-Control-Comparison.info
- ◆ Emergency Contraception or Plan B website at ec.princeton.edu
- ◆ Contracept.org - www.contracept.org/spermicides.php
- ◆ Center for Young Women's Health www.youngwomenshealth.org/femalebarrier3.html
- ◆ If you are uninsured and live in Washington State, you may qualify for FREE birth control under the State sponsored program called Take Charge. Call 800-770-4334 to find out if you qualify for Take Charge. Then you can apply for Take Charge at Cedar River Clinics.

Cedar River Clinics in Renton and Tacoma make birth control and abortion accessible so that women may decide their futures. www.CedarRiverClinics.org or 800-572-4223
www.facebook.com/CedarRiverClinics