

## **Spermicides: foam, suppositories**

### **How vaginal spermicides work:**

Vaginal spermicides come in several forms (gel, foam, cream, film, suppository, or tablet). Spermicides are chemicals that kill sperm. Some spermicides are commonly used along with a diaphragm or cap (i.e., gels, creams and foam) and others can be used alone. Spermicides are also used along with a condom to increase protection against pregnancy. Nonoxynol-9 (the active chemical used in products available in the United States) destroys the sperm cell membrane. Other spermicides are used in products made in other countries.

### **How to use vaginal spermicides:**

To use vaginal spermicides correctly, follow the instructions in the package. Often the package instructions will provide drawings and give specific advice about how soon the method is effective (e.g., immediately after insertion or to wait 10-15 minutes). Do not douche. Some women want to douche after using spermicides, but douching not only makes this method less effective, it is associated with an increased risk of pelvic inflammatory disease (PID) and ectopic pregnancy. For a spermicide to be effective it must be in the vagina for no more than one hour before sex. To increase the effectiveness, use the spermicide along with a condom.

### **Effectiveness:**

Research about the effectiveness of vaginal spermicides is not as clear as for other methods. Approximately 18 in 100 women will get pregnant in one year if they use spermicides correctly and every time they have sex (perfect use). Your chance of getting pregnant goes up if you don't use it every time (typical use).

### **Benefits and advantages of spermicides:**

Spermicides are an over-the-counter birth control method. Using vaginal spermicides does not require the direct involvement of the male partner. Spermicides are used as a back-up method when beginning pills, when pills are missed or when you are waiting to get an IUD. They can also be easily kept for immediate protection, for those who do not have sexual intercourse frequently. Using spermicide will not protect against HIV (AIDs) or sexually transmitted infections (STIs) such as gonorrhea and chlamydia.

### **Potential side effects or disadvantages:**

Some people report allergic reactions to spermicides; trying a different brand may help. Inserting spermicides may be difficult for some people. Frequent use of spermicides can cause internal vaginal irritation and increase risk of HIV infection.

### **Potential risks:**

No known health risks.

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