

# Vaginal Spermicides

## What are vaginal spermicides?

- Vaginal spermicides:
  - contain an ingredient (nonoxynol-9) that kills sperm
  - are put in the vagina before sex to help prevent pregnancy
  - work best when used with another method of birth control (e.g., condoms)
- Spermicides come as film, foam, gel, cream, or suppositories.
- You can buy natural vaginal spermicides at some drugstores or online pharmacies. These spermicides are different than the ones described in this handout. Talk to your doctor or pharmacist about using natural vaginal spermicides.

## How do vaginal spermicides work?

- When sperm comes in contact with a spermicide, the sperm dies and a woman can't get pregnant.

## How well do vaginal spermicides work?

- Spermicides only prevent pregnancy about 74 percent of the time.
- **Use both spermicide and a condom to help prevent pregnancy.**
- Vaginal spermicides **do not** protect you from sexually transmitted infections (STI) or Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV).

## What are the advantages of vaginal spermicides?

- You can buy vaginal spermicides at a drugstore or grocery store without a prescription.
- Vaginal spermicides provide extra lubrication.
- Women who cannot use a hormonal birth control method (e.g., vaginal ring, birth control pill, birth control patch) can use vaginal spermicides.

## What are the disadvantages of vaginal spermicides?

- Vaginal spermicides can be messy to use.
- You have to wait to have sex until after you have put in the spermicide.
- Vaginal spermicides can irritate your genitals (e.g., itchiness, redness, or pain) and cause tiny open sores. **If you have open sores, your chance of getting an STI and/or HIV is higher.** If you have any irritation or sores in your genital area, stop using spermicide and talk to your healthcare provider.
- Some women:
  - do not feel comfortable using spermicides
  - get bladder infections when using vaginal spermicides

## How do I use vaginal spermicide?

- Vaginal spermicides should not be used alone as birth control. Always use another form of birth control (e.g., condoms).
- **Always use the right amount of spermicide (directions on the package). Ask your pharmacist or doctor if you have any questions about using spermicides.**
- Put the spermicide up high in the vagina to cover your cervix.
- **You have to put in more spermicide each time you have sex.**
- You have to wait for a period of time before having sex (information on package) after you put in the spermicide.
- Do not rinse or douche your vagina for at least 6 hours after having sex.

## Important Things to Remember

- Check the expiry date on the package. **Never** use a product that is outdated.
- Always use spermicide with another method of birth control (e.g., condoms).
- Spermicide does not protect you from STIs or HIV.
- If you have not used spermicide correctly, did not use another method of birth control, or your other method of birth control has failed (e.g., condom breaks), contact your healthcare provider. Think about getting emergency contraception which can help prevent pregnancy.

## Sexual Decision Making

- Choose to have sex or not—you have the right to make that decision.
- Choose to protect yourself from getting pregnant and STIs.
- Use a condom every time you have sex to lower your risk of STIs.
- Talk with your partner about these choices before you have sex.

## For More Information Call:

### Sexual and Reproductive Health

Education/Health Promotion                      403-955-6515

### Clinical Services

Sheldon M. Chumir Health Centre	5 <sup>th</sup> floor, 1213–4 <sup>th</sup> St SW	403-955-6500
South Calgary Health Centre	31 Sunpark Plaza SE	403-943-9510
Sunridge Professional Building	406, 2675–36 <sup>th</sup> St NE	403-944-7666

### Website

[www.calgaryhealthregion.ca/programs/sexualhealth](http://www.calgaryhealthregion.ca/programs/sexualhealth)

For 24-hour nurse advice and health information, call Health Link Alberta at 403-943-LINK (5465) in Calgary or 1-866-408-LINK (5465) toll-free.

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