

spermicidal methods

For youth ages 13-29

Planned Parenthood Toronto Health Services

Offers drop-in and scheduled appointments
Call 416-961-0113 or visit www.ppt.on.ca

For youth ages 13-19

Teen Health Source

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What are spermicidal methods?

- Spermicidal methods are birth control methods that work by putting a spermicide called nonoxynol-9 into your vagina*. Spermicide is a chemical that kills sperm when it comes in contact with it.
- **Vaginal Contraceptive Film (VCF)** is a square of clear film you place in your vagina* that turns into a gel that contains spermicide.
- **Spermicidal foam or gel** is a foam or gel containing spermicide that you squirt into your vagina using an included applicator.

How do spermicidal methods prevent pregnancy?

- In order to get pregnant, sperm must enter your vagina, swim up into your uterus* and fertilize an egg that has been released from your ovaries during ovulation.
- Spermicidal methods place nonoxynol-9 spermicide (which kills sperm) over the opening of your cervix (the entrance to the uterus), preventing sperm from getting inside and reaching an egg.

How effective are spermicidal methods?

- **VCF** and **spermicidal foam or gel** are 94% effective. This means that if 100 people used VCF, foam or gel correctly for one year, only 6 people would get pregnant.
- Because these methods may be used incorrectly, they are closer to 72% effective with typical use.

*We know that these aren't the words everyone uses for their bodies (eg. trans folks), and support you using the language that feels best for you.

How do you use spermicidal methods?

- Spermicidal methods work best when placed over your cervix. You may want to practice finding your cervix before using a spermicidal method. It is located at the top of your vagina and should feel like a smooth donut with an opening that feels like the tip of your nose.
- Get into a comfortable position to insert the spermicide. You may want to squat, put a foot up on a chair, or lie on your back.
- If you have a physical disability and/or cannot comfortably reach your cervix, you may need a partner or support person to help you use a spermicidal method.

VCF

- Fold one film over your finger and push it as deep into your vagina as you can. VCF is most effective if you use your finger to place the VCF over your cervix.
- Wait 15 minutes to allow the film to dissolve into a gel before having vaginal sex.
- VCF protects you from pregnancy for a single act of vaginal sex up to 3 hours after inserting it. You will need to put in a new film for every additional act of sex, or if 3 hours have passed.

Spermicidal foam or gel

- Insert one pre-filled applicator into your vagina and press the plunger to squirt out the whole applicator full of foam or gel.
- Spermicidal gel or foam works immediately after you insert it.
- It protects you from pregnancy for a single act of vaginal sex up to 1 hour after inserting it. You will need to put in a new applicator of foam or gel for every additional act of sex, or if 1 hour has passed.

How do you start using a spermicidal method?

- You do not need a prescription for spermicidal methods.
- You can buy spermicidal methods at a pharmacy:
 - **VCF**: about \$17 for a box of 9
 - **Spermicidal foam or gel**: about \$19 for a box of 10
- Check the expiry date before buying/using a spermicidal method.

What are the side effects of spermicidal methods?

- Spermicide can irritate your vagina or your partner(s)' penis*, causing a burning sensation.

- Spermicidal methods may lead to vaginal infections like yeast or bacterial vaginosis (BV).
- They can increase your risk of urinary tract infections (UTIs).
- In rare cases, spermicides can cause an allergic reaction.
- The likelihood and degree of side effects from spermicidal methods may depend on how often you are using them.

Advantages of spermicidal methods

- You only have to use these methods when you have sex.
- There are no hormonal side effects. People who can't or do not want to take hormonal birth control can use these methods.
- They don't affect your ability to get pregnant in the future.
- Your partner(s) don't need to be involved.
- You don't need a prescription to buy them.
- **VCF** may be easier to carry with you, less noticeable during sex, and less expensive than other spermicidal methods.

Disadvantages of spermicidal methods

- When used alone, spermicidal methods are not as effective as many other methods of birth control.
- You have to be comfortable touching the inside of your vagina.
- You or your partner could experience side effects.
- You should not use them if you or your partner(s) are allergic to spermicides.
- They do not protect against sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Using spermicides frequently may irritate your vagina, which can make getting some STIs more likely.
- **VCF** requires you to put a new film in each time you have sex, and wait 15 minutes for it to dissolve before it becomes effective.
- **Spermicidal foam or gel** requires you to put in a new applicator of foam or gel each time you have sex
- **Spermicidal foam or gel** can be messier than other spermicidal methods, and only works for 1 hour after insertion.