

**ABCD Family Planning**  
**Fact Sheet**  
**Vaginal Contraceptive Sponge (the sponge)**

**What is the sponge?**

The sponge is a method of birth control you can buy it at the drugstore without a prescription. It is made of soft polyurethane foam that you wet with water and then put in the vagina before intercourse. When it is in the vagina, the sponge prevents pregnancy for up to 24 hours no matter how many times you have sex. It does not use hormones to prevent pregnancy.

**How does the sponge work?**

The sponge contains a spermicide called nonoxynol-9, a chemical that kills sperm. The sponge also covers a woman's cervix (the opening to her uterus) so that sperm cannot reach the egg and fertilize it. To prevent pregnancy, the sponge must be left in the vagina for at least 6 hours after the last time you had sex.

**How well does the sponge work to prevent pregnancy?**

How well the sponge works to prevent pregnancy depends on if you use it the correct way every time. The sponge works better for women who have never given birth than for women who have given birth in the past. If 100 women use the sponge for a year, between 17 and 24 of them will get pregnant. The sponge does not work as well as many other methods but it can still be a good method for some couples. It is more effective if used with a condom.

**What do women like about the sponge?**

- The sponge is reversible (not permanent).
- You use this method of birth control only when you need it.
- The sponge has few side effects.
- The sponge is private (no one but you needs to know).
- The sponge can be put in and taken out by women themselves.
- Your partner does not need to be involved for this method to work.
- Women who cannot or do not want to take hormones can use the sponge.
- It is available at the pharmacy and does not require a medical exam or prescription to buy.
- One sponge prevents pregnancy for up to 24 hours. You do not have to add more spermicide no matter how many times you have sex while the sponge is in the vagina during that 24 hours.
- Women who are breast feeding can use the sponge.

**What do women not like about the sponge?**

- The sponge DOES NOT protect you from HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).
- The spermicide in the sponge may cause irritation of the vagina. This may increase the risk for some women of getting HIV if her sexual partner has HIV. You must use condoms every time you have sex to decrease the risk of STDs and HIV.
- The sponge **cannot** be used if a woman or her sexual partner has an allergy or sensitivity to nonoxynol-9 spermicide, polyurethane, or sulfa drugs.
- You have to remember to put the sponge in your vagina before you have sex
- The sponge does not prevent pregnancy as well as many other methods of birth control.

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### What are the possible side effects of using the sponge?

- Bladder infections
- Vaginal infections
- Toxic shock syndrome (TSS), a rare but very serious infection. To lower your risk of TSS, never leave the sponge in your vagina for longer than 30 hours, and never use the sponge during your menstrual period
- The spermicide used in the sponge called Nonoxynol-9 can irritate the vagina which may increase your risk of HIV infection.

### You should not use the sponge if you have any of the following:

- Toxic Shock Syndrome (TSS) in the past
- Your menstrual period
- An allergy to spermicide, polyurethane, or sulfa drugs
- A birth, miscarriage, or abortion in the past 8 weeks
- Many bladder infections in the past
- Vaginal infections in the past that are hard to get rid of
- High risk of HIV infection. Talk to your health care provider about your HIV risk

### Call your health center right away if you use the sponge and have any of the following:

- Pain when you urinate or blood in your urine
- Vaginal discharge that is not normal for you, or discharge that has a bad smell
- Lower stomach pain
- Vomiting or diarrhea
- Dizziness, faintness, or weakness
- Sore throat, aching muscles and joints
- A sudden high fever
- A sunburn-like rash
- Rash, burning, or itching outside the vagina
- Missed a period or think you might be pregnant

**If you are unable to take all or part of the sponge out of your vagina return to your health center right away for assistance.**

**Contact your health care provider** if you think you may have a sexually transmitted disease (STD) or want to stop using the sponge and start using another method.

- To decrease your risk of HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), use a latex condom every time you have vaginal, anal, or oral sex.
- Emergency contraception (EC) prevents pregnancy when used no later than 5 days after unprotected sex. If you need EC or want more information, call your health care provider, family planning counselor, or pharmacist.