

the sponge

What is the sponge?

- The sponge is a disposable, circular sponge made of a soft polyurethane foam that you put inside your vagina*. The sponge contains a spermicide called nonoxynol-9. Spermicide is a chemical that kills sperm when it comes in contact with it.

How does the sponge 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. The sponge covers over your cervix (the entrance to the uterus), preventing sperm from getting inside and reaching an egg.
- The spermicide in the sponge kills sperm.

How effective is the sponge?

- The sponge is 90% effective. This means that if 100 people used the sponge correctly for one year, only ten people would get pregnant.
- Because the sponge may be used incorrectly, it is closer to 84% effective with typical use.
- If you have given birth, the sponge is less effective.
- If you have vaginal sex (intercourse) after the sponge has been in for more than 24 hours, you are not protected from pregnancy.

How do you use the sponge?

- You may want to practice finding your cervix before you put the sponge in. Your cervix is located at the top of your vagina and should feel like the tip of your nose.
- Rinse the sponge under water. Squeeze it until you can see suds forming on the sponge.
- Get into a comfortable position to insert the sponge. You may want to squat, put a foot up on a chair, or lie on your back.
- With the ribbon loop side facing down, fold two of the sponge's sides together.

**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.*

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- Insert the sponge deep into the vagina. Then use one or two fingers to push the sponge over your cervix. You should not feel the sponge once it has been inserted.
- To remove the sponge, reach into your vagina with a finger and pull on the sponge's ribbon loop.
- There is no risk of the sponge getting lost in your vagina. If you have trouble reaching it with your fingers, try squatting to bring it closer to your vaginal opening or ask your partner to remove it.
- If you have a physical disability, you may need a partner or support person to help you insert and remove the sponge.

How to start using the sponge

- You do not need a prescription to buy the sponge. In Ontario, it is currently only for sale at Shoppers Drug Mart (approximately \$19/box of 3).
- The sponge works immediately after you insert it.
- For up to 24 hours, it protects you from pregnancy even with multiple acts of vaginal sex (do not take the sponge out between acts).
- Leave the sponge in place for 6 hours after your last act of vaginal sex.
- Do not leave the sponge in place for more than 30 hours total.
- You can insert the sponge well before you plan to have sex but see the time guidelines above to make sure the sponge is effective.

What are the side effects of the sponge?

- The sponge can irritate your vagina or your partner(s)' penis* causing burning or itching.
- The sponge can also lead to vaginal infections like yeast or bacterial vaginosis (BV), especially if it's left in for too long.
- It can increase your risk of urinary tract infections (UTIs).
- In rare cases, the sponge can cause an allergic reaction. In extremely rare instances, the sponge can cause Toxic Shock Syndrome (TSS).

Advantages of the sponge

- You only have to use this method when you have sex.
- You are protected for multiple acts of vaginal sex for up to 24 hours, and you don't have to add new spermicide for each act.
- There are no hormonal side effects. People who can't or do not want to take hormonal birth control can use this method.
- It doesn't affect your ability to get pregnant in the future.
- Your partner(s) doesn't have to be involved.

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Disadvantages of the sponge

- You have to do something before you have sex.
- You have to remember to leave it in for 6 hours after the last act of vaginal sex before you can take it out. This may mean you have to wake up in the night to take the sponge out on time.
- You could forget to take it out.
- You have to be comfortable touching the inside of your vagina.
- You or your partner(s) may experience side effects.
- It can be expensive.
- In Ontario, it is currently only for sale at Shoppers Drug Mart.
- It does not protect you from sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Frequent use of the spermicides contained in the sponge may irritate your vagina, which can make getting some STIs more likely.
- It is not as effective if you have given birth.

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