

# DOUCHING

## *What is it?*

Douching means flushing the vagina with a non-irritating solution for internal cleanliness. The purpose of douching is to help the natural mechanisms of the vagina. *But remember*, the normal, healthy vagina is self-cleaning. A small amount of discharge from the cervix and the walls of the vagina flows downward and carries old cells, menstrual blood, and other matter out of the vagina *very* efficiently.

The amount of discharge varies over the course of a cycle from scant to moderate to lots. It will also vary in color and consistency, from white, sticky, pasty before ovulation, to clear, slippery, stretchy around the time of ovulation, and then back to white, sticky, pasty (or none at all) after ovulation and before menstruation.

## *Are there any benefits?*

Most clinicians agree there are absolutely *no* health benefits from douching on a regular basis. *Occasionally*, a clinician may recommend douching in addition to some medication or treatment you are already taking for a vaginal infection. But, in general, douching may do more harm than good.

## *What's so bad about douching?*

Some researchers suspect that douching may help the spread of infection, by pushing it up into the uterus with the force of the water [or whatever other solution you might be using]. It may also wash away some of the "good" bacteria that help keep the "bad" bacteria in check.

## *If I really feel the need, or my clinician recommends it, what do I do?*

- Use gentle water pressure. If you use a bulb syringe, squeeze *very* gently. If you use a hanging bag, don't hang it more than 2-3 feet above your body.
- Seated on the toilet, or reclining in a bathtub, insert the douche tip 1-2 inches into your vagina. Let the water flow into the vagina slowly.
- Try and hold the water in till you feel fullness in your lower abdomen. Then release it and let it flow out.
- Use plain warm water, or water mixed with 1 tablespoon of white vinegar. Water will do the same as the commercial products on the market, without irritating vaginal tissue. If you must use a commercial product, use it at half strength.

## *What's the take-home message?*

- Don't rely on douching as a method of contraception. The water pressure may just force sperm into the uterus where they can continue on their way unimpeded.
- Don't douche if you think you might have an infection. The process may just help spread the infection up into the uterus. In addition, a clinician may not be able to see any evidence of an infection if you have douched.
- Don't douche for 3 days before a pelvic exam, as it may alter your pap smear results, and again, your clinician won't get to see your "natural" environment.

*A service of the Klotz Student Health Center's Health Promotion Dept.*

For more information, please call 818 677-3666 or 677-3692 (tty)

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