

Questions About Douching



What is douching?

- “Douching” is washing or cleaning the vagina with water or other mixtures of fluids. Douches can be purchased at drugstores and grocery stores and usually consist of water mixed with vinegar, baking soda, or iodine. They usually come in a bottle with a tube or nozzle for squirting the liquid into the vagina.

Why do women douche?

- Some women douche because of vaginal odors, discharge, itching, or pain. But if you have these symptoms, you might have a sexually transmitted disease (STD) or some other infection – and douching won’t help. You should make an appointment at a clinic to be examined.
- Other women believe douching will prevent them from getting pregnant after unprotected sex. But douching does not prevent pregnancy and should never be used as a means of birth control. Actually, douching may make it easier to get pregnant because the liquid spray could push the sperm further up into the vagina and cervix.
- Remember: Douching does NOT prevent STDs or pregnancy.

Should I douche?

- No. Douching is NOT recommended as a routine or occasional practice for feminine hygiene.
- Don’t worry, your vagina can clean itself!
 - Women do not need to douche to wash away blood, semen, or vaginal discharge. Your vagina cleans itself naturally and can get rid of these fluids on its own by producing mucous.
 - The vagina is relatively acidic, which keeps the amount of vaginal bacteria down (though all healthy vaginas contain some bacteria and other organisms called the *vaginal flora*). Douching can change the delicate chemical balance in the vagina, creating conditions that make it easier for bacteria to grow. This may make a woman more prone to vaginal infections. Douching can also spread existing vaginal infections up into the uterus, fallopian tubes, and ovaries.
- What you can do:
 - Regular washing with warm water and mild soap during baths and showers will keep the outside of the vagina clean and healthy. Doctors suggest women avoid scented tampons, pad, powders, and sprays. These products may increase a woman's chances of getting vaginal infections.
 - Remember that even healthy, clean vaginas may have a mild odor.

**If you must douche, do not douche 3 days before pelvic exam or PAP test because douching can alter your test results.