

# WIPE, DON'T DOUCHE!

**Douching is washing or cleaning out the vagina by squirting water or other fluids into the vagina through a tube or nozzle. Although douching is common in some cultures, most experts recommend that women do not douche.**



## **Why Wipe?**

Regularly cleaning the outer lips of the vagina with wipes or washing with warm water and mild soap will keep the outside of the vagina clean and healthy. It is important to note that even healthy, clean vaginas may have a mild odor. The inner vagina cleans itself naturally by producing mucous.

## **How Should I Wipe?**

Gently wipe from front to back. Use on the outer vaginal lips only. Do not use wipe on skin that is broken, irritated, or itchy. Use wipe only once and then throw away in the trash.

## **Why Isn't Douching Safe?**

Most experts say that douching increases a woman's chances of infection. All healthy vaginas contain a balance of "good" bacteria and other organisms called vaginal flora. Douching can change this delicate balance. This may make a woman more likely to get vaginal infections. Also, douching can spread existing vaginal infections to the reproductive organs, which can cause fertility problems (difficulties getting pregnant). The only time a woman should douche is when her healthcare provider recommends it. Women should also avoid using scented tampons, pads, powders and sprays. These can also increase a woman's chance of getting a vaginal infection.

If you need additional information, contact the Family Health Line at 1-800-451-2229

## **What are the dangers linked to douching?**

Research shows that women who douche regularly have more health problems than women who do not. Health problems linked to douching include:

- vaginal irritation,
- a vaginal infection called Bacterial Vaginosis (BV)
- Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs), and
- Pelvic Inflammatory Disease (PID)

PID is an infection of a woman's uterus, fallopian tubes and/or ovaries. It is caused by bacteria that travel from a woman's vagina through her cervix up into her reproductive organs. If left untreated, PID can make getting pregnant difficult and increase a woman's chances of ectopic pregnancy (pregnancy outside the uterus). Some STDs, BV, and PID can all lead to serious problems during pregnancy.

## **My vagina has a terrible odor. Should I douche?**

No. Douching will only cover up the smell. It will not make it go away. If your vagina has a bad odor, you should call your doctor right away. It could be a sign of an infection, STD or a more serious problem.

## **Should I douche to get rid of vaginal discharge, pain, itching, or burning?**

No. Douching may even make these problems worse. It is very important to call your doctor right away if you have:

- Vaginal discharge with a bad smell
- Thick, white or yellowish-green discharge with or without a smell
- Burning, redness, and swelling of the vagina or the area around it
- Pain when urinating
- Pain or discomfort during sex

These may be signs of an infection or STD. Do not douche before seeing your doctor. This can make it hard for the doctor to figure out what is wrong.



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