

Douching

We respect your right to responsible sexuality!

Why do you douche?

“I douche to feel clean.” Because the vagina is self-cleaning, douching upsets its normal balance and makes it more likely for odor-causing bacteria to grow. Stop douching to allow your vagina to return to its normal state and you will find you won’t need to douche.

“I’ve noticed an odor.” The vagina smells different at different times during your monthly cycle. That is normal and healthy. If you notice an odor that is different than usual, that doesn’t go away after bathing, you may have an infection and will want to see your doctor for testing.

“I douche after sex to feel clean and/or to avoid getting pregnant.” Douching is not birth control. You should never douche to prevent pregnancy. It doesn’t stop the sperm from traveling up the vagina to fertilize the egg and may make it easier by pushing the sperm further up into the vagina. The normal fluids inside of the vagina protect it and keep it healthy and well-balanced. Douching rinses away this protective fluid lining.

“I don’t want to get a sexually transmitted infection.” Douching won’t help prevent an STI. In fact, douching can hide an infection by temporarily rinsing away the odor causing bacteria or the discharge that occurs when there is an infection. If you have an infection, douching doesn’t get rid of it (only medication can) and because it rinses away the protective lining, douching can make you more likely to get an infection.

Still not sure if you should douche? Research shows that douching causes more problems and concerns than it prevents. Let’s examine the research:

- In women who douche, there is an increased risk of Bacterial Vaginosis (BV) - a vaginal infection caused by an imbalance of normal bacteria in the vagina.
- Douching is associated with “preterm delivery” (a baby being born too early) and with “low-birth-weight” (when a baby is born weighing too little.)
- Douching increases the risk of Pelvic Inflammatory Disease (PID) – an infection in and around the reproductive organs. It can also cause a tubal pregnancy (when the baby starts to grow in the Fallopian tubes, instead of the uterus.)

If you still believe douching is “good hygiene” after reading the information above, examine why you think this. Is it because your mother and grandmother douched? How do commercial products available to help “keep you clean” contribute to your beliefs (sprays, powders, deodorant sanitary pads, etc.) Keep in mind their business is selling products, not health. What is your partner’s view of the “right” way to care for your body?

• If you find you still need to douche, consider using plain water rather than a commercial product. It is less disruptive to the vaginal lining than douches containing vinegar or bleach.

Good Health to you and all your parts!

Kent County Health Department ♦ Personal Health Services ♦ 700 Fuller Ave NE ♦ Grand Rapids, Michigan 49503
616/632-7171 ♦ www.accesskent.com/health

This fact sheet is for information only and is not meant to be a substitute for talking with a health care provider.