Vaginal contraceptive film [1]

Alice,

I have recently become aware of the vaginal contraceptive film (VCF) and am wondering about its effectiveness. We are currently using condoms, but my husband is not thrilled with them. Is the VCF as effective as the condom to use by itself?

Answer

Dear Reader,

Vaginal contraceptive film (VCF) is a soluble film—a super thin, wafer-like substance filled with spermicide, usually nonoxynol-9—that's inserted into the vagina before intercourse and then "melts," delivering spermicide (chemicals that kill sperm) into the vagina. Nonoxynol-9 spermicide is also available in jelly, cream, foam, suppository, and tablet forms, and is coated on some lubed condoms; however, these condoms have been found to offer no more protection against pregnancy than those without spermicidal lube.

VCF, when used alone, is far less effective against pregnancy than a condom, which, when used consistently and correctly, offers a 97 percent protection rate. VCF seems to be most effective when used as a back up with another form of birth control. As far as sexually transmitted infections (STIs) are concerned, VCF does not protect against them. The only form of birth control effective for STI prevention is a condom.

The following ideas can help increase the contraceptive effectiveness of VCF:

- Using dry, clean fingers, insert one VCF sheet into your vagina, making sure it's placed on or near your cervix.
- Wait at least fifteen minutes after insertion to allow the VCF to dissolve in the vagina before having intercourse.
- Use a new VCF for each sex session as a single application is good for up to only one hour after initial insertion.

Finding a form of birth control that you're comfortable with can be difficult. To learn more about your options, check out Go Ask Alice!'s contraception archives [2]. You can also check out the Planned Parenthood [3] web site. Trying various kinds of latex condoms may yield a certain favorite. Adding a little dab of lube inside the condom can also help make it more comfortable for the wearer, as can switching off occasionally with another form of contraception, such as a diaphragm or the female condom. Perhaps "skins" (condoms made
from lambskin that protect against pregnancy only) or the new polyurethane male condoms would be fun to try. As opposed to latex, polyurethane conducts heat and allows for more sensation. Other options include both non-hormonal (the sponge, a diaphragm, or an IUD) and hormonal (the pill, Depo-Provera, the ring, the patch) choices. After some discussion and possibly sampling your options, you can then make a more informed decision about which method would best meet both of your needs.

Alice!
Category: Non-hormonal Options & Choices

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