

## **DOUCHING, POPULAR BUT DANGEROUS FOR WOMEN**

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Women and adolescents, I urge you to take this simple true-false quiz to find out if you really know the truth about douching.

1. Douching keeps the vagina 'clean'.
2. Douching prevents infections in the vagina.
3. Douching prevents sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).
4. Douching prevents pregnancy.
5. Douching can do no harm
6. You must 'douce' your vagina after each sexual intercourse.
7. You must 'douce' your vagina after each menstruation.

If you answered 'False' to all the statements, then bravo, I congratulate you on knowing the facts about douching. If you were not certain or answered 'true' to even one of these statements, then please read on and dispel the popular myths about douching.

Douching of the vagina is a practice that is popular among women of all ages. It is very prevalent among women of certain ethnicities especially African-American women, less among Caucasian or Asian or Latino women.

The word 'douche' is derived from a French word 'douche' meaning 'bath' or 'wash' or 'a stream-jet of water or liquid directed on to or into a cavity'. In translation to English, it therefore means rinsing or cleaning of a cavity e.g. the ears, or in the case of women; the vagina.

Different solutions or even medication may be used for this purpose. These solutions are either prepared by the woman herself or are bought from a pharmacy or grocery store. The solution is contained in a bottle that is connected to tubing and nozzle that is inserted high into the vagina. The douche bottle is held high above the vagina so that the solution is squirted into the vagina under some pressure. Popular douching solutions are vinegar or baking soda. Douching solutions that can be bought at the drug or grocery stores are becoming more and more popular, because of claims of giving a 'pleasant and desirable female scent' or making the woman more desirable and alluring to her partner during sexual activity.

Population based studies indicate that adolescents, young sexually active women, women of African-American ancestry, women who have a history of sexually transmitted diseases, women who have multiple sexual partners, women who engage in sex frequently, girls who did not complete high school, women whose mothers themselves douche encouraged their daughters to douche, are the ones who douche most frequently.

Research indicates that mothers, sisters, female relatives and friends are the most frequent advisers to women who douche, and encourage the practice. Television and the enticing advertisements of products which make the woman become more 'desirable', 'fragrant' and 'alluring' to her partner, are extremely strong factors in encouraging the practice of douching on a regular basis.

The popular belief among most women is that douching is necessary to keep the vagina clean and to remove 'harmful bacteria or organisms'. Women also think that douching prevents sexually transmitted diseases and prevents pregnancy.

It is logical to ask "How much of all this information is true and how much is myth?"

**The truth is exactly the opposite.** Douching in fact, does more harm and has the potential to cause more damage/infections than it can claim to cure. This is because douching actually washes away the good protective organisms such as Lactobacillus species which protect the vagina against infections. There is growing evidence in clinical research studies to prove this point. Douching also does not prevent pregnancy, even though it is popular for this purpose. Douching does not prevent Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs). Douching does not impart an 'alluring and desirable' fragrance to the vagina.

Douching can cause harmful effects such as:

1. Bacterial Vaginosis, an imbalance of the bacterial population of the vagina, is much more frequent in women who douche. Bacterial vaginosis has been associated with increase in risk of acquiring HIV infection, post hysterectomy pelvic abscess and chronic infection of the lining of the uterus (womb) causing menstrual problems like irregular bleeding. This happens because the douching washes away the protective bacteria such as Lactobacillus.
2. Preterm delivery and preterm premature rupture of membranes, the risk of these complications of pregnancy is almost double for women who douche.
3. Pelvic inflammatory disease may be increased in women who douche.
4. If douching is utilized during pregnancy, it could cause air from the douche tubing to enter into the blood vessels (especially if the douching is done under pressure) and cause air-embolism (air in the blood vessels traveling to the heart) leading to death. Douching under pressure was, in fact; used as a method of causing an abortion for unwanted pregnancies. During the years that the practice was utilized, mostly in an illicit fashion, many deaths occurred as a result of it.
5. Repeated, regular douching can make your 'Pap' test to return abnormal, simply because it causes irritation and inflammation on the cervix and vagina. If your 'pap' smear comes back abnormal and you do not tell your doctor that you douche frequently, then the doctor may advise you to undergo a 'colposcopy' and biopsies. This is an invasive procedure and may create unnecessary anxiety for you, because you might think that you have 'cancer' of the cervix when your 'pap' is abnormal.

In conclusion, women beware of the dangers of douching. Not only is it unnecessary, it causes numerous potential dangers to your health. Remember that the vagina is completely capable of keeping itself clean and protecting itself against infections. Let the vagina do its work, do not try to 'help' it, because you may cause more harm than good.

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