Dear Alice,

I've always used condoms combined with a sponge for birth control. That worked well because if anything happened with the condom, there was always a backup?it made me feel safer. Then I get to New York, I go into three drug stores, and none of them have sponges. Now what? I don't want to rely on just condoms, I don't want to take pills because the whole hormone thing is rather frightening, and a doctor said that diaphragms make you more prone to get urinary tract infections, which I get frequently. So what am I supposed to do? What's up with this total absence of sponges?

?Spongeless

Answer

Dear Spongeless,

Never fear, the sponge is here (again)! As of May 2009, the contraceptive sponge is back on drug store shelves. Sponge-users can also purchase a three-pack for $13.99 on the Today® Sponge website [2].

Since its debut in 1983, American women have had an on-again/off-again relationship with the contraceptive sponge. The sponge first disappeared from store shelves in 1994 when the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) discovered a manufacturing problem. In 1998, Allendale Pharmaceuticals, Inc. bought the rights to manufacture the Today® Sponge, but more stringent FDA regulations delayed distribution of the sponge until 2005. The sponge was available until 2008 when the next manufacturer, Synova Healthcare Group filed for bankruptcy. These days, the sponge has yet another distributor?Mayer Labs. Meanwhile, the sponge has gained a certain cult status thanks to a "Seinfeld" episode that coined the phrase "spongeworthy" in reference to a potential romantic partner deemed worthy of using a precious sponge.

Despite its appeal, the sponge contains spermicide, which can irritate the delicate tissues of the vagina and urethra, leading to urinary tract infections (UTIs) or other forms of vagina infections (vaginitis). If you continue to have frequent UTIs while using a diaphragm or the sponge, you may want to consider another form of birth control. Other non-hormonal, non-spermicidal contraception choices include tubal ligation (sterilization), the copper-T IUD, the female condom, and fertility awareness (ranging from most to least effective).
You may find it helpful to talk with a health care provider about the best pregnancy prevention method for you. Before your appointment, you can find information about other types of contraception in the related Q&As below.

If the sponge is still worthy of your approval, look for the new teal-colored packaging at your drug store or pharmacy.

Alice!
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Sexual & Reproductive Health [3]
Contraception [4]
Non-hormonal Options & Choices [5]

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How do birth control pills work? [6]
Sponge... worthy as form of contraception? [7]
IUD (intrauterine device): Another birth control option [8]
Tubal ligation [9]
Missed Depo-Provera shot ? Pregnant? [10]

Resources

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Published date:
Nov 01, 1994
Last reviewed on:
Apr 22, 2015

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