

# Is douching safe? What to know about the controversial process

May 22 2023, by Kirstie Ganobsik

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Millions of women practice douching for what they think are its health

benefits, but exactly what is douching and is it really safe?

Here, experts warn that it may do more harm than good, and advise you about what you can do instead of douching.

## **What is douching?**

Vaginal douching comes from the French word *douche*, which means "wash." According to the Cleveland Clinic, it is the practice of inserting a solution into your vagina to wash or cleanse it.

Typically, a douching solution includes a mixture of water and some other ingredient like vinegar, baking soda or soap. Some people will purchase douching kits from the store that contain an antiseptic cleaning solution and a high-pressure applicator for injecting the solution.

The Office of Women's Health (OWS) says that about one in five American women between the ages of 15 and 44 choose to douche. There are several reasons, including to get rid of vaginal [odor](#), itching or discharge, to prevent pregnancy after sex, to prevent infections or just to ensure cleanliness.

"People choose to douche because they don't feel clean enough," Cleveland Clinic nurse practitioner Molly Gumucio said in a recent article. "They have an odor and they're trying to get rid of it. Or after intercourse, sometimes, they want to use it."

## **Is douching safe?**

No, douching is not considered safe, says the OWS. It can be bad for the body for a variety of health reasons, and at best will only temporarily stop odor and other vaginal issues. It also does not prevent pregnancy or

infections.

"Douching is not advised because the vagina is a self-cleaning organ," Gumucio explained in a recent Cleveland Clinic article. "When you try to cleanse it yourself by using a douche, you actually flush out the normal, healthy microbes as well as temporarily change the pH, which changes the acidic versus basic nature of the vagina."

By flushing out healthy microbes and changing the pH, the OWS says that douching may cause an overgrowth of fungus and bacteria in the vagina. This can lead to:

- Vaginal yeast infections
- Bacterial vaginosis (a vaginal bacterial infection)
- Pregnancy issues, such as early childbirth and ectopic pregnancy
- Sexually transmitted infections
- Vaginal dryness and irritation

A serious health condition called [pelvic inflammatory disease](#) can also occur after douching with a high-pressure applicator, which can push germs up into reproductive organs.

## What to do instead of douching

The OWS says that you shouldn't do anything instead of douching.

It's best to allow your vagina to cleanse itself, as it was built to do. It does this by making mucous, which helps flush out blood, vaginal discharge and semen.

You can simply wash the outside of your [vagina](#) regularly with mild soap and water to cleanse away whatever was discharged in the mucous. This can help cut down on vaginal odors, itching and recurring infections.

"Try to avoid using scented body wash and just stick to [warm water](#) and gentle soaps that usually don't strip away all that [good bacteria](#) and flora," Gumucio advised.

The OWS and Gumucio also recommend steering clear of scented feminine hygiene products, like perfumed tampons, sprays and powders.

"Some of the over-the-counter products tend to make your symptoms worse or irritate your skin," Gumucio said.

## When to seek medical advice

If vaginal odor, discharge, redness, burning or pain during sex or urination don't clear up in about a week, the Cleveland Clinic suggests making an appointment to see your doctor.

Gumucio explained, "if you smell a persistent and foul odor, or if any odor is accompanied by a thick or greenish discharge, you may have an infection. If you have pain, rawness or sores in your vaginal area, it's time to consult your doctor."

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Citation: Is douching safe? What to know about the controversial process (2023, May 22) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2023-05-douching-safe-controversial.html>

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