Douching Dangers

Viva la bacteria

December 1, 1998 By Lark Lands, PhD

In his novel *Even Cowgirls Get the Blues*, Tom Robbins gleefully skewered purveyors of douches, alluding to the fact that aiming a jet of perfumed liquid into a vagina has no known medical benefit and was pushed by greedy companies—usually run by men—to capitalize on women's sexual shame. But douching also poses serious dangers, according to two new studies, because it may wipe out beneficial *Lactobacilli* bacteria in the vagina, thus doubling the risk of HIV infection and increasing by 78 percent the risk of getting gonorrhea. For this reason, experts caution against douching and advise that yogurts with active cultures and *Lactobacillus* acidophilus–containing supplements be used to help restore these necessary bacteria.

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