

## The best natural sex lubricants

Don't waste your money on K-Y Jelly. Safer, more satisfying alternatives abound

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If you eat organic food and use organic health and beauty products, why shouldn't you continue to use organic and natural products in the bedroom?

Case in point, personal lubricants.

When you hear the term “personal lubricant,” your thoughts may immediately turn to [K-Y Jelly](#), a charming combination of water, glycerin, hydroxyethylcellulose, chlorhexidine gluconate, gluconolactone, methylparaben, and sodium hydroxide used by many to “[prepare] you for intimacy and [ease] the discomfort of vaginal dryness during sex.”

If you're not a chemist and you're tripping up on that ingredient list, the best place to hone in might be “chlorhexidine gluconate,” an antibacterial. Ellen Barnard, co-founder and co-owner of [A Woman's Touch](#), a store providing products and information for sexual health and pleasure in Madison, WI, says, “No way, no way, because what it does is it kills all your healthy [vaginal] bacteria.”

Still want to put that up yourself?

Fortunately, alternatives abound—both ready-made branded products you buy at the store, and homemade solutions as simple as aloe.

First off, why use a lubricant at all? Barnard, a social worker who co-owns A Woman's Touch with a physician, recommends one for "Any time [you] are using a condom, first of all, absolutely, no question" and "women with any dryness."

She qualifies this with: "I'm not talking about dryness because their partner has not spent enough time to get them aroused. But assuming the woman and her partner have taken that time, some women do not produce enough moisture to provide their own lubrication." Particularly, women who are breastfeeding, using oral contraceptives, or are post-menopausal.

Why? For those using a condom, it's a matter of safety—and pleasure. "Condoms, even when lubricated," notes Barnard, "do not have enough lubricant on them to prevent breakage and that is the biggest reason that condoms fail." She adds that a bit of lube added to the tip of the condom on the inside plus more on the outside is "a way to make it more fun for him."

As for the three groups of women she mentioned who might need a little help in the lube department, Barnard explains how women get wet in the first place. When a woman is aroused, there is increased blood flow to the vaginal walls, which stimulates the production of discharge. "Estrogen is the primary hormone that allows blood flow," and women who are breastfeeding, taking oral contraceptives, or post-menopausal have a paucity of estrogen.

So that's why and when to use lube. But what should you use?

"There are certain things that you should never let touch your vagina," says Barnard. Her list of "Do Not Use or Else" ingredients, as she calls it, consists only of chlorhexidine, the ingredient in K-Y Jelly noted above. But, she cautions, there are "other things I put very close to that list are anything that cause a warming or cooling sensation because they irritate the skin. That would include menthol, peppermint, cinnamon, capsaicin... If you use it repeatedly, it can lead to terrible skin reactions. And I've had a lot of women come in with really profound long-lasting skin irritations."

Then there are other ingredients used in lubes that some people can be sensitive to. "I don't put these on my do not use list," notes Barnard. "I put them on my 'if you are sensitive, do not put them on your genitals first' list." To test a product before using it, place a little bit on the skin inside of your elbow. Then wait a few hours to see if you have a negative reaction. If your skin gets red or itchy, do not use the product.

Barnard is aware that her opinions might be controversial with some, but she is not necessarily in favor of natural or organic lubes. That said, she has seen some products marketed as natural that work relatively well. Still, her top choice is silicone—either dimethicone or dimethiconol and not other types of silicone—because they do not absorb into the skin. That means you can use them without drying out. Plus, they are compatible to use with condoms.

Rather than endorsing specific brands, Barnard mostly prefers to examine individual ingredients. One ingredient many find concerning are parabens like methylparaben, ethylparaben, or anything else ending in -paraben. These are preservatives that [the Campaign for Safe Cosmetics](#) says are endocrine disruptors and are "also linked to cancer, reproductive toxicity, immunotoxicity, neurotoxicity and skin irritation."

Barnard finds the evidence dubious; she says the breast cancer link that is so often cited comes from one poorly conducted study that did not use a control group. She feels that there are more important endocrine disruptors (like BPA and phthalates) to get out of our lives first before worrying

about parabens. Ditch the plastic before you ditch your parabens-containing lube, she says. But if you want a parabens-free lube, you can find one.

Another “avoid” is anything oil-based. Yes, it might be natural, but alas, it has some serious downsides. For example, the oil can hang out in the folds of your vaginal skin and go rancid. Or there’s mineral oil, which Barnard says to avoid “because it is a petroleum product and it can have petroleum residues in it.” Or waxes like beeswax, shea butter, and jojoba oil. Those can “stay in the vagina and basically cause changes in how the vaginal skin replaces itself.”

Right. So go ahead and use your oil for a massage before getting frisky... but it should not multitask as lube.

Then what should you use? A few natural options include aloe or carrageenan. While natural and generally non-irritating, Barnard says, “The issue with both of those is that they do dry out over time during use and so when I’m talking about condoms, for example, you don’t want a lubricant on a condom that gets stickier as you’re going along because that’s one of the reasons a condom can break. Glycerin-based lubes absolutely do that and they do that very quickly.” (Barnard is also opposed to glycerin. In general, she’s more favorable about water-based lubes.)

A few possible products are Sliquid’s [organic line](#) or, if you want to break the bank, the water-based version of a product from the U.K. called [Yes](#). Barnard also mentioned another product called [Good Clean Love](#) that some people love, but others find irritating to their skin. (Remember, Barnard notes, poison ivy is natural, and you wouldn’t want to put that on yourself. Just like some of us are allergic to some foods, some of us are sensitive to certain natural plant products—and the last place to put those products is on our genitals!)

One last thing to know before you head off to the store and find a lube that works for you: the market is changing starting next year. As of Jan. 1, 2015, the FDA will require animal testing for personal lubricants. They are not testing to see how effective a product is as a lube, just whether or not it irritates the animals tested. “But just because the rabbits don’t get irritated doesn’t mean you won’t,” says Barnard.

Maybe the easiest option is to keep an aloe plant in the bedroom and cut off leaves as needed.