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How to choose your personal lubricant?

by Dr Philip under

When it comes to sex, sometimes we need a little help making things go, well, smoothly. Enter lubricants, also known as “[personal lubricants](#)” or, colloquially, “lube”. Lubricant can make intercourse more comfortable for women with *vaginal dryness*. It also helps for women who do not naturally moisten when aroused. Lubricant also makes it easier – and more pleasurable – to use condoms, a must for protecting against sexually transmitted diseases.



A 2014 Indiana University study (Ref. 1) found that 65% of women have used lubricant to make sex more comfortable, more pleasurable, or both. And in a survey of gay men in San Francisco who have anal intercourse, 89% said they always use lubricant during sex. However, despite lubricants' ubiquity and mostly benign reputation, research in the last several years has raised questions about the safety of some products - especially for certain groups of users. So here is what you need to know about the potential problems and how to protect yourself if you're choosing and using lubricant.

How safe are lubricants?

Conventional wisdom has held that lubricant reduces the chance of sexually transmitted infections by making the vaginal or anal area more slippery, thus cutting down on the risk of tiny tears that promote the transmission of infectious agents. But a 2012 report (Ref. 2) in the journal *Sexually Transmitted Diseases* found that men and women who had used lubricants for anal intercourse in the previous month were actually *more* likely to test positive for gonorrhoea or chlamydia than those who had anal sex without lube. The authors proposed that the observed increased risk may have been because the lubricants caused inflammation of the anus and rectum, making it easier for organisms to spread.

In addition, a 2014 lab study in the journal *Pharmaceutics* tested 12 lubricants sold in Europe (including popular brands such as K-Y Jelly and Replens) and found that some of them might alter the pH balance of the vagina, which in theory could increase the risk of certain vaginal infections. (The study didn't look at infection rates, just at the chemical composition of the lubricants). And a UCLA study published in 2013 found that women who used petroleum jelly or baby oil as a lubricant were especially likely to end up with [bacterial vaginosis](#) or a yeast infection. So much for pleasure. None of these studies definitely establishes that sexual lubricants directly cause any type of infection but it makes sense, therefore, to stick with the medically endorsed products such as [YES](#) and [Sylk](#) which are available via White Pharmacy.



The studies do however underscore the importance of using condoms, which are the surest way to prevent STDs (other than abstinence or a monogamous relationship with a monogamous partner).

Other lubricant caveats

Even if infection isn't a concern, commercial lubricants can contain ingredients that could cause irritation or allergic reactions in some people. Particularly common culprits include "numbing" lubricants that contain benzocaine a topical anaesthetic and "warming" lubricants which may feature menthol or capsaicin (the same ingredient in hot peppers). As in other skin products, lubricants that include fragrance or flavouring ingredients may irritate sensitive skin. Other potential irritants include the antibacterial agent chlorhexidine (in K-Y jelly), propylene glycol, glycerine and possibly more importantly a group of preservatives called parabens (often listed as methy-, butyl-, ethyl-, and propyl – paraben).

There is a growing concern about chemicals in personal products and their possible effects. You can determine if you're sensitive to a given product by dabbing a bit on the inside of your elbow and waiting a day to make sure no redness occurs. If you have an unusual reaction to a new lubricant, stop using it.

Two other caveats: [Oil-based lubricants](#) can degrade latex and should never be used with latex condoms. That includes natural lubricants like mineral oil and baby oil as well as commercial oil-based products.



Finally, there's preliminary evidence that certain water-based lubricants, including Astroglide and several K-Y products, might decrease sperm motility, though there isn't evidence that people who use them have lower rates of pregnancy.

Perhaps not surprisingly, there are a bewildering number of moisturizing and personal products available. A great many of the "supermarket"/OTC purchased lubricants contain various synthetic chemical ingredients. Ideally, an intimacy product should be free of all known skin irritants and be highly effective. On this basis White Pharmacy are happy to offer the range of [YES](#) and [Sylk](#) personal

lubricants - all pure, high-performing products which enhance rather than compromise your intimate health.

References:

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