



UNDRESSING DISABILITY

enhance the uk

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All about lube

A little bit of lube can go a long way when it comes to sex. Sadly, some people can feel a little bit embarrassed about using it but there is absolutely no reason to. Our helpful guide will explain the benefits of purchasing a bottle and how to know what type suits what sex best.

What is lubricant?

A lubricant is a liquid or gel that is designed to help you have better sex. Ultimately, it is designed to ease penetration by a person or a toy to make it more enjoyable and less painful. There are lots of different types available so it can be confusing to know where to start.

Sometimes our bodies don't produce enough natural lubricant or any at all so it can be essential to add a little artificial lubricant to the mix. Some varieties are better designed for things like pain, more sensitivity or that work better for those trying to get pregnant. The options are endless but there is a lot to think about before you buy.

How do I use it?

It's simple to incorporate lubricant into your sex life but it does require a little research into what type would suit you best. There are no right or wrong options out there unless it comes to condom and toy safety or using it with products that are latex. It's usually best to start with a small amount before building up. Some lubricants, in particular, water-based options can get a bit sticky after a while so you may need to top it up.

Lube can be added to the genitals, to toys or to hands with no difficulty although it could be cold at first!

Why should I use it?

There are so many different reasons why using a bit of lube can aid your sex life with or without a partner. Sadly, there can be a bit of embarrassment and stigma to using lubricant when there really shouldn't be. We all need a bit of extra help for multiple reasons that are nothing to do with our ability to get aroused.

Here are some of the common reasons why people may need lubricant:

If you are someone who menstruates then you may find that your vagina can produce less natural lubrication during different times in your cycle. This is because oestrogen levels fluctuate causing dryness on certain days especially just before or after you start your period.

For those who menstruate, menopause is another reason for needing a little extra lube when it comes to sex. This is again due to oestrogen levels dropping making it harder to produce natural lubrication. It can also be a problem for those who have had a hysterectomy.

Dehydration can also be another reason for needing a little more lube.

People with autoimmune diseases such as Sjögren syndrome can struggle with vaginal dryness.

Hormonal birth control can also play a part when it comes to a lack of lubricant.

Anyone having anal sex will need lubricant as the skin around the anus is incredibly delicate and can tear easily. It is essential to help facilitate sex with others or toys to avoid this happening and causing damage. It can also help to reduce the pain felt with penetration. If you do use lube during anal sex, then it pays to stay aware of how much you apply because there is more chance of a condom breaking with the friction caused by dryness as there is no natural lubrication in this area.

Stress, anxiety and depression also don't help when it comes to dryness. Even if we are mentally into the idea of sex, our bodies can have different ideas. This can be especially true if there are pharmaceutical drugs involved like SSRIs which can make this even more difficult. A small bit of lube can help to get the game started.

Some medical conditions can make sex painful or decrease the amount of lubricant that the body produces such as diabetes.

Chemotherapy can also affect lubrication. This can be due to a sudden loss of oestrogen production in the ovaries.

Perfumed soaps, washes or products can sometimes upset the balance of the vagina making it harder.

These are just some of the reasons why you may find it beneficial to use lubricants. Also, sometimes lube can just be fun!

What do I need to watch out for when shopping?

Ingredients

Not all lubricants are created condom or toy-safe sadly.

It is important to check to see what the product you intend on using is made from before you add them to your sex life. Anything oil-based can degrade latex condoms meaning they could split or tear. Silicone based lubricants are not suitable for silicone toys either and they may cause problems. Water-based lubricants are perfect for latex condoms although it's not always safe to assume that every lubricant is okay without checking the label first.

Additives

Sometimes things are added to lube to give it an extra 'kick' such as tingle gels or smells. While these may be all fine with you, your partner may feel differently about a sudden blast of mint or a warming sensation if they aren't expecting it.

Communication (and consent!) is essential here and it can be really fun to shop for these things together if you want to.

It's also worth noting that if your partner is neurodiverse (or you are) then certain smells can be really difficult for them. There are a lot of different flavours available from Pina Colada to mint or blueberry so it just means a simple switch if needs be. Alternatively, there is absolutely nothing wrong with going classic and fragrance-free.

Allergies

Sometimes, people can have allergies to different ingredients which can make shopping for sexy items like lube, or condom difficult. If your partner is allergic to a particular additive, then communication is essential ahead of time as is knowing what to do if you accidentally use something that they may be allergic to. There is nothing sexy about an A&E trip if it can be avoided.

Glycerin and Vaginal PH

Some lubricants, especially water-based ones, can contain glycerin. This can, on occasion, alter the vagina's PH leading to increased yeast production. If someone is prone to yeast infections, then this could be something to be mindful of when shopping. Oil-based lubricants can be associated with higher rates of Candida, a type of fungus that can cause yeast infections.

It can help to look for lubricants that are PH-balanced. Other ingredients that can appear in lubricants to avoid are nonoxynol-9 and propylene glycol chlorhexidine gluconate.

Lubricants and trying to get pregnant

Surprisingly, lube can interfere when you are trying to get pregnant. It pays to do a bit of research ahead of time to find the best options for this circumstance such as water or silicone-based products because they tend to be thinner than oil-based versions. Anything flavoured may also interfere with the natural PH of the vagina causing it to disrupt the sperm while it swims into the fallopian tubes. There are sperm-friendly lubricants on the market but it can take some searching.

Extra considerations

Lube holders

Sometimes a lubricant bottle can get very messy, very quickly which makes it difficult to keep to hand. Alternatively, some people may struggle with their grip that makes holding a bottle or application very difficult. Some companies offer an additional plastic item that resembles a plastic ring that can fit a bottle in to make it easier to hold.

Sensitive skin

When you visit a new hairdresser, you are quite often given a patch test before a product is applied to the whole head to see if it reacts with your skin. It makes sense, when you think about it, to test lubricants similarly by applying a small amount of your skin to see if you are okay with it or don't mind the smell or texture.

It might sound a bit over the top but it's better to find out you have an allergy that way compared to finding out when it's been used internally. However even if you pass a skin test, there may still be differences in how the mucous membranes react so it's a good idea to follow with a second test in and around the vulva or anus to check.

Lube and Pain

There are a number of different conditions that can cause painful sex such as endometriosis, vulvodynia, pelvis inflammatory disease or even skin conditions such as eczema. While lube is not a treatment for any of these conditions, they may help to make sex a little bit easier or more pleasurable.

If you or your partner are struggling with pain, speak to your GP. It is also important to listen to your body when having sex and if it starts to hurt - stop. If your partner is in pain - stop.

Lubricants can help to reduce friction making sex a bit easier. However, this may not be enough in some cases so it is worth speaking to your GP.

These products are not always lubricants but can be gels or creams too. The idea behind them is to numb the area to reduce pain rather than lubricate the area.

Your GP may prescribe different things to help such as an anaesthetic gel. These numbing agents are safe for use but are not always great with latex so switching to another alternative might be the better option.

There are good and bad points to using numbing gels and it may be an individual person's preference on what they want to try. Some numbing gels are available over the counter but some will need a doctor and a discussion before you start using it.

The different types of lube

**Please check to see that all lubricants, regardless of variety, are condom or toy safe before use.*

Water based

Water-based lubricants are one of the more popular choices because they are usually body and latex safe. However, it's important to check before assuming that this is the case because you never know until you check. It should be one of the more natural options out there as well, meaning it is thinner than an oil-based one so less likely to be heavy on the skin and easy to remove with a quick shower. On this note, water-based products should wash easily out of bed sheets without staining them.

Water-based lubes should work perfectly with sex toys too and have a longer shelf life. They may dry out a bit quicker so you have to use a little more of them.

Oil based

Oil-based lubes are not condom safe and will cause anything latex to split.

If you are prone to yeast infections, then oil-based lubricants could create a bit of a problem as they are associated with higher rates of candida which is a type of

fungus that causes infections.

There may be a little bit of a stain left with oil-based products that might be hard to get out of your favourite bed sheets. Not only that but you will need a bit of scrub too as they are more difficult to get off the skin - this also means getting it out of the skin which could lead to yeast infections.

Silicone based

Silicone lube is one of the longer-lasting options out there. It can be perfect for shower sex as it is also waterproof. It is hypoallergenic too which means most people won't experience a reaction.

However, silicone lubricant cannot be used with silicone toys as it degrades the material, especially ones that are realistic or silicone themselves. Bacteria can set in where any tears occur making your favourite dildo dangerous. Toys can be really expensive so it's worth investigating if they are silicone-lube safe before you add a drop.

Flavoured

If you can think of a flavour, then chances are there is quite possibly a lube of it. Flavoured lubes can be a bit of extra fun during oral. However, you will still need to check its condom or toy safe before you use although a lot are water-based.

It's also worth being mindful that some smells are overwhelming to people, especially when it comes to neurodiversity. Allergies are another problem to be aware of so always ask before you use them.

Anal lube

All lubricants can be used for vaginal or anal sex but some are designed to be better suited to certain areas. Anal lubes feel a bit thicker which helps to provide a longer-lasting product in an area that doesn't naturally produce lubrication itself. This can help to prevent a condom from breaking with drier or extra friction.

Organic, natural or sustainable

As we become more aware of the strain on the environment when it comes to synthetic products or plastics, some people are switching to more sustainable options.

These lubricants can be a good option for anyone who needs a more sensitive product or wants an artificial ingredient free experience. They should be free of parabens too

Formulas can vary widely so it's important to buy from a reputable source so you know what you are buying. Some natural oils can include coconut or avocado can also be edible which is a plus.

It's important to avoid cross-contamination by having a jar for the bedroom that is separate from your kitchen stash. You can pick up some nasty bacteria by switching uses. Again, you need to be conscious of condom or toy safety by researching the product that you choose to use. For example, coconut and avocado oils are not condom safe.

Natural lubricants won't have gone through the preservative process that artificial versions have. This will mean a shorter life span so make sure you 'throw 'em out, if in doubt.'

Tingle

Warming lubricants and tingle gels can add a little something to your sex life. They are designed to stimulate the nerve endings making your body more sensitive to touch. Some can be intense however so it's worth doing a patch test before you apply a larger amount to your body to see if you like it.

The smell can be a downside of using these lubricants as a lot of the tingle gels are heavily scented especially with mint. If someone is neurodiverse or struggles with perfumed products, then this may not be the best option.

CBD

A lot of lubricants now have a little bit of CBD added to their ingredient list.

CBD is a cannabinoid found in the cannabis plant but before you worry about getting high off your own supply of lube, it's non-psychoactive. CBD is thought to interact with the endocannabinoid receptors in our bodies which regulate things like anxiety, pain or depression.

One thing to note with shopping for CBD lubricant is that you need to be extra careful that you get a product designed for that particular area as there are a lot of massage oils or tinctures that aren't suitable. Another important note is that a lot of CBD isn't water-soluble which means it won't be condom safe so check the label first before assuming it's good to go.

CBD is a discussion to have with a partner as they may be nervous to try it and want to do their own research first. While it isn't anything to be scared of, your partner deserves the right to discuss what they use in their body first. The CBD is absorbed through the mucosa in the vagina or anus during sex or play. Alternatively, CBD can also be taken orally if this isn't something you want to incorporate into your sex life.

Some studies show that CBD may help with anxiety and nerves which could help you to relax during sex. It may also help with painful sex or bruising.

How do I know if I'm allergic to lube?

Allergies can happen and it's vital to get help if you start to experience difficulties after using a new product.

Speak to a doctor if you experience:

- Difficulty breathing
- A rash
- Swelling (in particular on the tongue, throat, or face)
- Itching
- Develop a yeast infection
- Hives



About us

'Undressing Disability' is a global campaign which aims to raise standards in sexual health and sexual awareness for disabled people. Issues around sexuality and sexual frustration are frequently raised by disabled people who feel that they have less opportunity and ability to explore their sexuality than others. Through a lack of understanding, education and a general lack of services, disabled people frequently cannot access the support that would make it possible for them to make the sorts of choices about their lifestyles that most of us take for granted. As part of our campaign we run the Love Lounge, an online forum providing free advice on all things sex, love and disability. We also have free downloadable resources. As a user-led charity, our aim is to change the way people view disability, which often involves removing the 'fear factor' that so often surrounds the subject. We support businesses to be more inclusive by providing disability awareness training, British Sign Language workshops and accessibility audits, amongst other things.

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CHANGING SOCIETY'S VIEWS ON DISABILITY