

Guidelines for Selecting Lubricants

Whether you need lubricants to help with vaginal dryness after cancer treatment or simply want to experiment with these products, there are hundreds of lubricants available for use in sexual activities. Choosing the right lube can be confusing. If your immune system is at all compromised after treatment, making the right choice for you is important. How to make the best choices?

Many people just figure it out as they go but that's not the smartest way. How to select the one that's best for you is not something covered in sex education classes, *Consumer Reports* or most personal care publications. So where do you go for solid information? Maybe you stick to a brand that a lover turned you on to and you're happy settling with that. If you're blessed with friends with whom you can chat about the nitty-gritty of the bedroom, they may recommend their favorite brands. But lube preference is so personal that one person's miracle lotion may be another person's irritant.

Your doctor? No. Sadly, most physicians and health practitioners, including gynecologists and urologists, are under-informed and give limited lube advice.

Online shopping yields pretty pictures of the bottles and labels, but no way to try the products, so that's a crapshoot. There is one online resource, A Woman's Touch, that will send samples so you can check them out (www.a-womans-touch.com).

At some point, you'll need to go hunting for lube at brick-&-mortar stores. Depending on where you shop, you may be faced with a paltry selection shelved in some corner, or a wall of a thousand lubes with no information, or shelves full of potions, all promising ecstasy.

If you're lucky there might be a sales staff who is knowledgeable, but that's unlikely at grocery stores, pharmacies and porn shops. If at all possible, go to places where they have tester bottles available. If there are sex-positive boutiques in your area, go there. Sex toy home party services fill the gaps in places where there are no sex-positive shops. Be aware, however, that merchandise quality and level of staff knowledge varies wildly.

Now it's time for the initial screening to find the lube that's best suited for you. Here's a seven-step process to do at the store to narrow down the choices and make the most intelligent selection.

A Woman's Touch has a wonderful chart comparing different lubricants, which follows this article.

7 Steps of Lube Selection:

What you'll need: Go to the store's lube tester section armed with moist towellettes or tissues.

If there are no testers available at the store, ask them to make testers available. Smart stores interested in a profit will jump on this suggestion. Otherwise, see if they sell mini packs or trial sizes. Then buy a variety of lubes in the smallest available size, take them home and follow the following seven steps. If the lube fails at any step with a "no" vote from you or your lover, it's out of the running immediately. Just move on to the next lube.

The Seven Steps are:

Step 1 - Read the Label

Step 2 - Initial Texture

Step 3 - Slipperiness Endurance

Step 4 - Bouquet

Step 5 - Taste

Step 6 - Allergy test

Step 7 - Bedroom Test

Step 1 - Read the Label

The label is the first and important step in assessing the possible quality of the product. If it promises all sorts of sexual wonders like some latter-day snake oil, don't even consider buying it. Does it show the manufacturer's contact info and country of production? Both indicate some level of accountability.

Does it have an ingredients label? Don't use a mystery potion manufactured by people who can't even be bothered to list the contents of their product. Who knows what they put into the lube and under what conditions it was manufactured? If you're concerned about what you put into your mouth and stomach, you should be equally concerned about what you put on or in or on your genitals, especially if your immune system is at all compromised following cancer treatments.

The simpler and purer the ingredients list, the nicer it's likely to be to your body. The more unnecessary junk that's thrown in, the greater the possibility of your body having an adverse reaction. There's a degree of variance of course, depending on your desired activity, body parts involved and individual sensitivity. The vagina has a delicate eco-system easily thrown out of balance, leading to yeast infection, urinary tract infection and other assorted minor to major medical issues. It can be even more delicate following cancer treatments, which can leave the tissue friable, so delicate and thin that it tears very easily.

Some prefer more natural or organic products like organic coconut oil or shea butter, or products with aloe vera, herbs or botanical ingredients. Be aware that oil-based products will degrade latex. Some herbal ingredients can cause irritation, so be careful in your choices. Natural does not always mean benign.

Ingredients to consider avoiding include:

- Parabens, a family of chemical preservative commonly used in cosmetics, causes irritation and allergic reactions for many.
- Nonoxynol-9, which was used frequently in the past as a spermicide and microbicide, has been found to increase the likelihood of STI transmission because it often causes irritation of the skin and genital lesions. I think it's better left in poison ivy ointment where it's also commonly used.
- Petrochemicals, not only are they unnatural, but will degrade latex and add to vaginal dryness.
- Silicone is wonderful for slipperiness but can contribute to vaginal dryness, which may be the source of the problem. Should not be used with silicone, jelly or Cyberskin toys or devices because it will melt them.
- Glycerin, which can cause yeast infections. Glycerin is essentially a form of sugar that can feed the yeast, leading to a big and unwelcome yeast party. If yeast infections aren't a problem, these will be fine for you.

The label should allow easy identification if it's water-based, oil-based, glycerin-based or silicone-based. It's also helpful to know the pH of the lubricant because some that are more acidic and can help avoid yeast infections, can also cause a burning sensation for others.

There are many lubricants that are designed specifically for women. This is a good place to start. It's also important to know what you want the product for ~ is it to ease friction, to moisturize your vaginal and vulvar tissue, to stay wet for along time, or a combination? Will you use it for play with toys, for penetrative sex (with or without condoms) or for massage? All these factors influence what to choose. It's probably a good idea to have several for different purposes.

Some things to consider regarding the use of the lubricant:

- To help with vaginal or vulvar dryness, try a moisturizing lubricant
- To keep condoms intact, use more silicone-based lubricants to enhance the light lubrication they often come with. It's the friction that can cause condoms to break, so use a LOT of lube, as condoms are thirsty for lube.
- If you experience burning or stinging, check the pH and go for a less acidic and more alkaline formulation
- You can combine more than one product at a time to get the best result for you.

Step 2 - Initial Texture

If the lube in question passes Step 1, pour some of it on the palm of your hand. Rub it around. Do you like the initial feel of the fluid? Will you like the texture for the type of sex you've got on your mind? Some people prefer a watery texture for masturbation, oral or vaginal sex, and a thicker lube for anal play. Others like a particular texture for toy fun than for non-toy play time. Is it a keeper or not? If not, toss it and try another.

Step 3 - Slipperiness Endurance

Keep rubbing your hands together with the lube that passed Step 2. Keep rubbing them for several minutes.

How long does it stay slippery?

Does your skin suck it up like moisturizer, leaving nothing behind?

Does it get tacky and glue-like?

Does it get hotter? Stay away from warming lubricants, which often contain a lot of glycerin. Depending on the other ingredients they can cause irritation over time.

After several minutes, would you like it for your intended sex play?

Keep or toss?

Step 4 - Aroma

Hold your palms up to your nose.

Do you like the way it smells? Does it make you sneeze?

If you don't like its fragrance, you're never going to enjoy having your face near it. If you like your own or your lover's skin and sex scent, go for unscented. If you'd like to embellish your or your lover's fragrance, try a scented one. Keep in mind, however, that some people may have sensitivity to fragrance additives. For those with sensitivity perfumes, scents and non-essential ingredients should be avoided. Keep or toss?

Step 5 - Flavor

Many people don't bother to taste their lube when testing potential purchases. It's likely to end up in your mouth one way or another, so tasting it is important.

Lick your palm. Or if you prefer, lick your partner's palm if they've been doing the rubbing and sniffing so far.

Do you like how it tastes?

Do you like how it tastes with your skin or theirs?

Like the fragrance, the decision for flavor or flavor free is up to you. If you want to taste sex and skin *au naturale*, make sure you find the totally flavorless one. Even if

it's labeled as "unscented" or "unflavored" you may still pick up a chemical taste displeasing to you.

If you want a tasty topping for your sex play, make sure it agrees with everyone's palate and body chemistry.

Since every manufacturer has a different formula for flavoring, don't trust the label; one brand's "raspberry" might not taste like another brand's "raspberry." Some flavors make cough syrup seem like ambrosia, and some lubes are so yummy you may want to drink it.

Keep or toss?

Step 6 - Allergy test

If you have sensitive skin or allergies to skin and cosmetic products, this is an important step. Pour another dollop of the lube in your palm. Using your finger, swab a generous amount on the inside of your lower lip. This is the substitute mucus membrane. Rub some on the inside of your forearm as well. Wait.

Wait some more.

Do you feel any itchiness, bumps, irritation, swelling or any other telltale sign of allergic reactions?

If you are at home, put some on your outer and inner labia after doing the lower lip test without any of the above allergic reactions.

If you notice any signs of an allergic reaction, rinse the area liberally with cool water to remove the product and reduce the sensations.

Keep or toss?

Step 7 - Bedroom Test

Now that you've narrowed down your selection to a few favorite lube candidates, it's time to give them the classic bedroom test.

Buy the smallest size available in each of the winning lubes, take them home and have fun. This can be a time for you and your partner to have some fun and be playful. Or if you prefer, play sex researchers or doctor. Keep the victors and vote the losers off the bed.

New lubes are being introduced constantly and old ones often get a formula change without notice. Don't just settle on a lube—be a gourmet sexualist and try new ones from time to time.

Enjoy!

~ Includes some information from CarnalNation.com



	GLYCERIN BASED LUBRICANTS					NON-GLYCERIN NON-SILICONE LUBRICANTS					SILICONE BASED LUBRICANTS									
	Astro-glide	Carra-geenan	ID Glide	Probe Thick Rich	Aloe Lube	Sex Grease/ Sensura Lube	Pleasure glide	Sliquid Organics Natural	Sliquid Organics Silk	Liquid Silk	Pre	Slippery Stuff	Pre~ Seed	Maximus	ID Millennium	Eros	Pink	iLube	System JO	Eros Gel
Consistency (cushion)	Thin	Thin	Thin	Thicker	Thicker	Thickest	Thinnest	Thinner	Thin	Thin	Thin	Thick	Thickest	Thinnest	Thin	Thick	Thicker	Thicker	Thickest	
Taste?	Little Sweet	Little Bitter	Little Sweet	No	Little Bitter	No	Bitter	No	Little Bitter	Little Bitter	Very Salty	No	Little Salty	Bitter	No	No	No	No	No	
No "Chemicals"				X				X	?			X								
Reduce Yeast Infections							X	X	X	XXX		X	X	XX	XX	XX	XX	XX	XX	
Prevent Condom Breakage	X	XX	X		XX	XXX	X	X	X	XX	X	X	X	XXX	XX	XX	XX	XX	XX	
Moisturize Vulva/ Vagina Due to Discomfort or Dryness		XXX			XX	XX		XX	XX	XXX		XX		XXX	X	X	XX	X	X	
Increase Sensitivity Inside Tip of Condom	X	XX	X	X	X	XX	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Post-pregnancy Dryness		XX				X		X	X	X		X		X	X	X	X	X	X	
Trying to Become Pregnant (ideal: 6.5-7.0)												XXX			X	X				
Adic/Base "pH" (premenovag = 4.5-5.5)	6.5	4.4	5.2	5.8	4.8	4.6	5.8	6.0	6.5	4.8	7.0	6.3	6.8	5	4.4	4.8	4.5	4.6	4.6	
Ask A Vagina?	Almost Neutral (very high)	Acidic	Normal Vaginal pH	High-Normal Vaginal pH	Normal Vaginal pH	Normal Vaginal pH	High-Normal Vaginal pH	Almost Neutral (very high)	Almost Neutral (very high)	High-Normal Vaginal pH	Neutral (very high)	Almost Neutral (very high)	Almost Neutral (very high)	Normal Vaginal pH	Acidic	Normal Vaginal pH	Acidic	Normal Vaginal pH	Acidic	