

## **Lubricants: The Slippery Secret Of Great Sex, Especially After 40**

*By Michael Castleman*

It takes only 10 seconds to demonstrate that sexual lubricants enhance lovemaking:

- Close your mouth and dry your lips.
- Run a finger lightly over them, paying close attention to how it feels.
- Now, lick your lips.
- Run the same finger lightly over your moist lips, again focusing on how it feels.
- Notice any difference?

Chances are the caress with lips moist felt more sensual. If so, sexual lubricants can help you enjoy more pleasurable lovemaking. This is especially true after age 40 when women's natural vaginal lubrication begins to diminish.

### **The Best Sex Is Wet Sex**

Have you ever suffered discomfort because intercourse took place without sufficient natural lubrication? Commercial lubricants eliminate this problem. Has a woman ever run out of natural lubrication during extended intercourse, chafing one or both of your genitals? Lubricants to the rescue. Have you ever wished that condoms transmitted more sensation? With a lubricant, they can. Have you ever suffered discomfort during anal play? Lubricants make it much more comfortable.

### **The Overlooked Element in Lovemaking**

In the finger-on-the-lips exercise, the lubricant was saliva. Good old saliva is the world's most popular sexual lubricant. It's effective, readily available, and free. But saliva is also more watery than slippery. It dries quickly. And for pleasure enhancement, it's not as effective as commercial lubricants. For modest cost, commercial lubes add new sensuality to lovemaking.

Unfortunately, only a minority of American lovers use lubricants. Why? Because most people believe that “normal” sex involves only the body, and nothing else. Actually, lubricants are as natural as any other sex enhancer: candlelight, music, lingerie, or a glass of wine.

Many sex guides overlook the pleasure lubricants add to lovemaking, mentioning them only in passing for women who do not produce sufficient vaginal lubrication on their own. They make insufficient lubrication seem abnormal. It isn't. It's quite normal, especially after age 40. Some young women just don't produce much, and even if a woman self-lubricates copiously, she and her lover might enjoy a little more. But after 40, as menopausal changes begin, many women notice that they produce less vaginal lubrication. Finally, lubricants are not only for women. Many men find that they add new comfort and pleasure to both masturbation and intercourse, especially intercourse using a condom.

Most sex researchers have also ignored lubricants. The landmark 1999 “Sex in America” survey by University of Chicago researchers asked nothing about them. However, the survey asked women if they'd suffered insufficient vaginal lubrication during the previous year. Almost 20 percent said yes. Such a high prevalence of vaginal dryness suggests that millions of Americans are in the dark about commercial lubricants, which, in seconds, *eliminates* this problem.

### **Lubrication in Women: Masters and Johnson Got It Wrong**

In the 1960's, pioneering sex researchers William Masters, M.D., and Virginia Johnson described vaginal lubrication as the initial hallmark of sexual arousal in women, paralleling erection in men. They maintained that the vagina produces lubrication fairly quickly as women become aroused.

This is true for many women, but not all, particularly women over 40. In addition, for many perfectly normal women, vaginal lubrication is not the first physiological sign of arousal. It may take a while to appear, and when it does, there may not be much of it. To make matters worse, the fantasies in print pornography imply that every woman's vagina overflows with lubrication at the wink of any alluring eye. “I soaked my panties just looking at him!” Actually, it's just as likely for women to feel erotically aroused and *not* produce much lubrication. Possible reasons include:

- Individual differences. Some women naturally produce more vaginal lubrication than others. It's simply who they are. Unfortunately, women who do not produce much often feel abnormal, even though they are not. (Women who become “too” wet may also feel abnormal, and suffer

embarrassment about soaking the sheets. Try making love on a towel or two.)

- **Age.** The female sex hormone, estrogen, plays an important role in vaginal lubrication. Estrogen production begins to decline as menopausal changes commence. This process starts well before age 50. Some women notice decreased lubrication as early as their late thirties, and many experience it by their mid-forties. After menopause, many women experience persistent vaginal dryness.
- **The menstrual cycle.** Because estrogen influences vaginal lubrication, women often produce different amounts at different times of the month.
- **Childbirth.** Hormonal fluctuations may suppress lubricating for a while after delivery.
- **Stress.** Everything from job hassles to relationship tensions can impair sexual response in both men and women. In many women, stress reduces lubrication.
- **Drugs.** Many over-the-counter and prescription medications decrease vaginal lubrication. The list of potential lubrication suppressors includes: alcohol, cigarettes, antihistamines, cold formulas, birth control pills, marijuana, antidepressants and many other psychiatric medications, Lomotil for diarrhea, Urised and Ditropan for incontinence, scopolamine for motion sickness, and any medication that causes dry mouth.
- **Travel.** Everyone knows that flying across time zones induces jet lag. Jet lag may temporarily decrease lubrication.
- **Extended loveplay.** Even women who produce a good deal of natural lubrication sometimes need more during extended sex.

## **Lubrication in Men**

According to Masters and Johnson, shortly before orgasm, the Cowper's gland produces a few drops of lubricating fluid to moisten the head of the penis, facilitating insertion. This, too, is by no means automatic. In addition, men's natural lubrication rarely covers any more than the head of the penis. Without

addition lubrication, the shaft of the penis may become irritated during extended lovemaking.

## **Unexpected Erotic Pleasure**

The simple, economical, pleasurable answer to lubrication problems is a commercial lubricant. “Wetter is better,” says Palo Alto, California, sex therapist Marty Klein, Ph.D. “Don’t just limit yourself to just one application. Apply lube several times during extended sex.”

About applying lubricants: Don’t squirt them directly on your lover’s genitals. Right out of the container, they feel cold and jarring. Unless you’re with someone who likes a cold shock, apply a small amount to your hand, rub it between your fingers to warm it, and then caress your lover with lubricated fingers.

Try applying lubricants:

- During masturbation. A few drops can boost the pleasure of solo sex. Your hand glides easily over your genitals. Close your eyes, and it’s easy to fantasize that you’re receiving oral sex.
- On the clitoris. Women’s natural lubrication may not make it all the way up to the clitoris. Most women say they enjoy the greatest pleasure from gentle, well-lubricated clitoral caresses.
- On the penis and scrotum. Lubricant adds an extra dimension to caresses of men’s genitals.
- During vaginal intercourse. Don’t just lubricate the vagina. Try lubricating *both* the vagina and penis. When a well-lubricated penis enters a well-lubricated vagina, the coupling feels more comfortable, closer, and more erotically satisfying.
- On the nipples. In both men and women, erotically aroused nipples are exquisitely sensitive to touch. A few drops of lubricant make them even more so. Massage lotions can also add lubricant-like sensuality to nipple and breast caresses.

- Between the breasts. Many couples enjoy “tit fucking,” pressing the breasts together, and inserting the penis between them. Lube helps this go much more smoothly and comfortably.
- Anal play. The most common complaint about anal play (fingering or intercourse) is, “It hurts.” A key reason is lack of lubrication. “Unlike the vagina,” says Louanne Weston, Ph.D. a sex therapist in Fair Oaks, California, “the anal canal produces no natural lubrication. It’s also a smaller, tighter opening. No wonder that probing it often causes discomfort. Lubricants are a must for enjoyable anal play.” Use lubricant liberally in and around the anus, and on whatever enters it—usually just a finger, but also possibly a sex toy or penis. Replenish your lubricant frequently. In addition, the inserter should enter this erotic opening slowly and gently. Recipients often feel most comfortable when they control the speed, depth, and duration of insertion.

Note: Some lubricants marketed specifically for anal play contain an anesthetic (lidocaine or benzocaine), to help reduce discomfort. Be careful with these products. Discomfort is the body’s way of saying that something is wrong. Use of desensitizing products turns off the body’s own warning system and increases risk of injury. Anesthetics should not be necessary. Loving, gentle anal play should not cause discomfort.

- Sex toys. Lubricants enhance the pleasure of vibrators, dildos, and other sex toys. Sex toy marketers say toys should not be used without it. Lubricate both the toy and the flesh it touches.
- Condoms. Most condoms come lubricated with silicone powder. But for many lovers, a dusting of silicone is insufficient for comfortable insertion. Coat condoms with a water-based lubricant. For extra pleasure for the man, rub a drop of lubricant into the head of the penis *before* placing the condom over it.
- Erotic pauses. Some skeptics view the time it takes to apply lubricant as “an interruption.” Not at all. The beauty of music involves more than just the notes. It includes the silences between the notes. Similarly, sexual pleasure comes not only from intimate caresses, but also from the moments between them, as lovers savor the fondling they have just experienced and anticipate additional touch. Think of the time it takes to apply lubricant as erotic breaks that add spice to your lovemaking.

“I urge couples to use lube even when they don’t need it,” Klein explains. “It’s a good habit to get into. It makes sex more comfortable. And when you use it routinely, nobody gets anxious or self-conscious, about why the woman isn’t getting wet tonight.”

## **Four Kinds of Lube**

It may take a while to get used to using lubricants. Initially, you might find them messy or slimy. But it shouldn’t take long to appreciate the joy of well-lubricated sex.

Four types of lubricants are available over-the-counter: water-based, oil-based, petroleum-based, and silicone-based. Each has advantages and disadvantages. Consider the pros and cons, then experiment to see which you prefer.

### **Water-Based**

Most lubricants are water-based. They typically contain water; glycerine, a syrupy-sweet emulsifier; propylene glycol, which helps the product retain moisture; and a preservative. Water-based lubricants also come in two different consistencies, liquid and jelly: Liquid lubes include Astroglide, Slippery Stuff, Probe Silky Light, and KY Liquid. Jelly lubes include: Probe, KY jelly, and Elbow Grease.

Water-based lubricants are safe to use on the vulva, clitoris, and penis, and in the vagina and anus. They do not stain bed linen or clothing. It’s safe to ingest small amounts during oral sex. And they do not eat holes in latex condoms or diaphragms as petroleum-based lubricants do.

Although water-based lubricants are safe, some of the ingredients might cause irritation or allergic reactions in sensitive individuals. Water-based lubricants work fine on the genitals, but they are not designed to be used as massage lotions on large expanses of skin. Many water-based lubricants claim to be “taste-free,” but that’s not quite true. If you don’t like the taste, consider flavored lubricants. Or suck on a lifesaver while providing oral sex.

During extended lovemaking, water-based lubricants may dry out. Apply more, or refresh them with a little water. Keep a small bowl of water by the bed and dip their fingers into it. Or try using a spray mister. After sex, rinse water-based lubricants off with a moist wash cloth.

### **Oil-Based**

Oil-based lubricants include: vegetable oils (olive, corn, etc.), Crisco, butter, and nut oils (peanut, etc.). They are inexpensive and available at supermarkets. Oil-based lubricants can be used both on the genitals and as massage lotions. They may be safely applied to the vulva, clitoris, and penis, and used inside the vagina and anus. Crisco is a particularly good lubricant for anal play. Oil-based lubes are safe to ingest during oral sex. They do not eat holes in latex condoms, diaphragms, or cervical caps. However, they increase the likelihood that a condom might slip off the penis. That's why authorities in sexually-transmitted-infection prevention discourage oil-based lubes with condoms for safe sex. Oil-based lubes rarely cause irritation or sensitivity reactions. However, they may feel more greasy than slippery. They may stain bed linens and clothing, and require soap and water to wash off. (Water-based lubes rinse off with just water.)

### **Petroleum-Based**

Made from petroleum jelly, mineral oil, or petrolatum, these include: Vaseline and baby oil. Petroleum-based lubricants destroy latex and should *never* be used with condoms, diaphragms, or other latex contraceptives. Latex deterioration occurs remarkably quickly, according to a study by the Kinsey Institute. Within 60 seconds of contact, microscopic holes appear that are large enough for passage of sperm or sexually transmitted infection organisms.

In addition, petroleum lubricants should *not* be used inside the vagina. They are difficult to wash out, may irritate the vaginal lining, and change vaginal chemistry, increasing risk of infection. They should not be ingested, and may cause allergic reactions. Finally, petroleum lubricants may stain linens and bed clothes. Despite these drawbacks, many couples like petroleum-based lubricants, particularly for anal play.

### **Silicone-Based**

Silicone lubricants are the newest class of lube. They were introduced in the mid-1990s, a personal adaptation of industrial silicone lubricants (WD-40). Some couples like silicone because it feels silky and is not messy. It also retains its slickness longer than water-based lubes. Silicone lubricants do not damage latex. They are safe for use on the vulva, clitoris, and penis, and in the vagina and anus. They do not stain bed linen or clothing. It's not clear how safe they are to ingest, so it would be prudent not to. Although silicone lubricants are safe, some of the ingredients might cause irritation or allergic reactions in sensitive individuals.

## **Lubricants Appear to Kill the Virus that Causes AIDS**

Samuel Baron, M.D., a professor of microbiology at the University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston, identified another good reason to use lubricants. A few brands—Astroglide, Silken Secret, Vagisil, and ViAmor—contain compounds that kill HIV, the AIDS virus, and can reduce risk of HIV transmission. Baron's team tested 22 brands of lubricants. They added a little of each to samples of HIV-infected human semen. The four lubricants destroyed HIV in the white blood cells the virus infects. They also killed free HIV in the semen. The four HIV-killing lubes reduced viral replication by more than 99 percent. Baron is now working to identify the HIV-killing compounds in the four lubricants.

This was a laboratory study. It's not clear if the four lubricants—or others containing the still-unidentified HIV-killing compounds—would prevent HIV transmission in the real world. "I want to be very clear," Baron says, "that to prevent HIV transmission, people should use condoms. Condoms first. But sexual lubricants help prevent condom breakage, so apart from any HIV-preventive value they might have, they help keep condoms intact, which is valuable. In addition, lubricants are safe and inexpensive, and they make intercourse more comfortable. Sexuality authorities recommend them. If I were non-monogamous or with a new partner, the situations where HIV transmission is an issue, I'd use a lubricant that has shown activity against HIV, even if only in a laboratory study. I mean, why not? There's no downside, and there's a potentially major upside."