Personal lubricants

What are personal lubricants?

Personal lubricants are liquid gels that are used during sexual activity. Personal lubricants are most often used to make sex more comfortable and enjoyable. This can be for any kind of sex: partnered sex, masturbation, or when using sex toys. Lubricants can also be used to help insert menstrual cups, tampons, or pelvic floor trainers.
There are different types of lubricants available and many brands on the market.

The three main types of lubricants are:

- **Water-based**
- **Silicone-based**
- **Oils**

Water-based lubricants

Water-based lubricants are the most commonly available personal lubricants and there are numerous kinds available. They are suitable for use with condoms and with sex toys.
Water-based lubricants are absorbed by the skin. This can mean they may dry out and need re-application during sex. However, some water-based lubricants can also act as vaginal moisturisers, which is helpful if vaginal dryness is a problem.
There are factors that influence how healthy water-based lubricants are for the vagina. These are:

- pH (how acid or alkaline something is) The natural pH of the vagina is between 3.8 to 4.5 and it is recommended that the pH of any personal lubricant for penetrative vaginal sex be as close to this as possible.
- Osmolality (the number of dissolved particles in a fluid). If the osmolality of a lubricant is high, it will draw moisture out from the vaginal tissues causing dryness. The osmolality of any personal lubricant should be under 1200mOSm/kg and ideally closer to 400mOS/kg. Correct osmolality is sometimes called iso-osmolality.

The water-based lubricants listed here have the recommended pH and osmolality for use with vaginal sex. *

- **Astroglide® Ultra Gentle Gel**
- **Good Clean Love® water-based lubricants**
- **Sylk® Natural Personal Lubricant**
- **Sliquid® Organic H2O**
- **YES® Water Based Intimate Lubricant**

Yes® Vaginal Moisturiser is a moisturiser which can be used as a vaginal lubricant. It has the correct pH and osmolality.

Silicone-based lubricants

Silicone-based lubricants are made from silicone polymers. Silicone-based lubricants are not absorbed by skin or mucus membranes. This can make them longer lasting. They provide excellent lubrication but do not have a moisturising effect.
Silicone-based lubricants are suitable for use with condoms. They are also suitable for use when water is involved, such as in the shower or bath. They not recommended for use with silicone sex toys because they may interact with the surface of the toy, damaging it and causing disintegration over time.
There are many silicone-based lubricants available in pharmacies, supermarkets, and online.

Oils and oil-based lubricants

Oils can be a useful lubricant and vaginal moisturiser, although they do not provide moisture to the same degree as the moisturising water-based lubricants. Oil-based lubricants can be a cost effective and chemical free option.
Importantly, oils cannot be used with latex or polyisoprene condoms as they weaken the condom which can lead to breaks and tears. It is also recommended to avoid using oil-based lubricants with silicone sex toys.

Oil-based commercial lubricants

There are many different oil-based lubricants available on the market, both online and in pharmacies. The following two are just some of the ones available*:

- **Olive and Bee® Intimate Cream**
- **YES®OB Oil Based Personal Lubricant**

- **Food grade oils:**

Any food grade oil such as olive oil, coconut oil, avocado oil etc. can be used as a lubricant. Lighter oils are preferable to avoid staining of bed clothes etc.

Sweet almond oil (available in health food stores or online) is recommended by the Australian Menopause Society as a moisturising lubricant that can also help relieve vaginal dryness.

Personal lubricant use and becoming pregnant

If you are trying to become pregnant it is important to use the right lubricant during sex. While lubricants cannot help you to become pregnant, some lubricants have been found to interfere with sperm movement, therefore reducing the likelihood of conceiving. This can be due to harmful additives, the incorrect pH, and other factors.

When trying to conceive the following factors are important:

- If possible, select a lubricant that contains hydroxyethyl cellulose
- Avoid lubricants that contain parabens or fragrances
- Do not use oils such as coconut or olive oil
- Avoid using saliva as a lubricant

Lubricants available that state they are fertility friendly: *

- **Good Clean Love® -biogenesis fertility friendly lubricant**
- **Pre-Seed® Fertility Lubricant**
- **First Response® conception friendly lubricant**
- **Conceive Plus® fertility lubricant**

Lubricants and anal sex

Using lubricants for anal sex is important to reduce friction, improve comfort, and reduce the risk of condoms breaking.

- Water based lubricants work well, they are compatible with condoms, won't damage silicone sex toys, and will not stain clothing or sheets. However, they can dry out quickly, so do need reapplication.
- Silicone-based lubricants are a great alternative to water-based lubricants. They don't dry out the way water-based lubricant can, and therefore can last longer. Silicone-based lubricants are the best lubricants to use in water, such as the shower or bath. They can stain clothing and sheets so you may want to take care to protect these. They are not suitable for use with silicone sex toys.
- Water and silicone hybrid lubricants are also available. These can provide the benefits of water-based lubricant while lasting longer.
- The natural pH of the rectum is around 7.0 so it may better to use a lubricant with a pH closer to this for anal sex.

Lubricants are available in supermarkets, pharmacies, sex shops, and online.

*Please note, this factsheet is for your information only. SHFPACT does not necessarily endorse individual products. The products listed here are just a few of the personal lubricants that are available.

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References: World Health Organization- www.who.int/publications/i/item/who-srh-23.4

Resources: National Library of Medicine- www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3427535/; Mayo Clinic Health System: www.mayoclinichealthsystem.org/hometown-health/speaking-of-health/trying-to-get-pregnant-select-a-lubricant-that-is-most-helpful-for-sperm; American Society for Reproductive Medicine- en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Society_for_Reproductive_Medicine#Publications; Pelvic Health & Rehabilitation Center- pelvicpainrehab.com/blog/truth-and-friction/