Slippery Slope: What Your Vagina Wants You to Know About Lube

What's Lube, Anyway?

Vaginal lubricants are gels or liquids that help reduce friction and ease dryness, something many people experience at some point in life. Vaginal dryness can be caused by menopause, breastfeeding, certain medications, or health conditions. In fact, **more than 65% of women in the U.S. say they have used a lubricant in the past month.**

Why Some Lubes Cause Trouble

Lube is meant to make things more comfortable, but not all lubes are created equal. Many products on the market do not match the natural chemistry of the vagina. Research shows that some may even **irritate or damage delicate vaginal tissue** over time.

pH and Osmolality: Two Words That Matter

Your vagina has its own ideal balance, and the wrong lube can throw it off.

- **pH:** Healthy vaginal pH is slightly acidic, between 3.8 and 4.5. A lube that is too alkaline (high pH) can irritate tissue and make infections more likely.
- **Osmolality:** This measures how much a product pulls water from your cells. If a lube's osmolality is too high, it can actually dehydrate vaginal tissue, even after one use.

When pH or osmolality are off, your vaginal lining can become irritated or more **vulnerable to infections, bacterial vaginosis, and sexually transmitted diseases.**

Ingredients to Watch Out For

Some lubes contain chemicals that do not belong anywhere near your vagina. These can cause irritation or increase infection risk.

- **Parabens (methyl-, propyl-)** – Preservatives linked to irritation and possible hormone disruption.

- **Chlorphenesin** – An antibacterial that can irritate healthy skin.
- **Capsicum extracts** – Found in "warming" lubes; can cause burning or stinging.
- **Fragrance, flavor, or aroma** – These can hide dozens of undisclosed chemicals, including allergens and reproductive toxins.

How to Choose a Safer Lube

Your vagina deserves better. Here's how to find a product that is gentle and effective:

- Look for a pH of 3.8–4.5 and an osmolality below 380 mOsm/kg.
- Skip unnecessary extras such as colors, scents, and "tingling" features that do not add health benefits.
- Read the ingredient list and avoid harsh or mystery chemicals.
- If you notice irritation, try a different brand. The right lube should not cause discomfort.
- You can report problems with a product to the FDA or your state health department.

What About Silicone Lubes?

Silicone-based lubricants do not contain water, so they do not have pH or osmolality concerns. That is good news. However, many include chemicals such as **cyclopentasiloxane** and **cyclotetrasiloxane,** which are restricted in the European Union because they can build up in the body andthe environment. There is still very little research on their long-term safety for vaginal use, so use them thoughtfully.

A version of this fact sheet including all scientific references is available on our website: *bit.ly/vhw2025*

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