

# Know How to Use Vaginal Moisturizers and Lubricants

## For women and their sexual partners

Read this resource to learn:

- What vaginal dryness is ..... 2
- The risks linked to vaginal dryness ..... 3
- How vaginal moisturizers and lubricants can help ..... 4
- When to get medical help..... 15

### A message to patients and families at Southlake Regional Health Centre

This pamphlet was made by staff at the Princess Margaret Cancer Centre and reviewed by your healthcare team at Southlake to meet your needs.



Patient Education



**UHN**

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## About Vaginal Dryness

The vagina makes its own natural fluid (lubrication, also known as “lube”). The fluid keeps the vagina elastic and healthy.

When women are sexually aroused, their vagina will produce extra fluid. This fluid helps reduce friction. It makes putting anything into the vagina more comfortable. This also helps make sex feel more pleasurable.

When the vagina does not produce enough fluid, it causes vaginal dryness

### What causes vaginal dryness?

The 3 main causes of vaginal dryness are:

1. **Older age.** Dryness in the vagina is common as women age. The dryness also causes the vagina to be less elastic. Women may start to see changes in their natural lubrication in their late 40s and early 50s.

Women produce less estrogen as they get older. Estrogen is a hormone that plays an important role in keeping the vagina moist.

2. **Lower amounts of estrogen in your body.** This can be caused by menopause (when a woman’s monthly menstrual period stops). Menopause can happen naturally with age or can be caused by some types of surgery, such as surgery to remove the ovaries.

3. **Some types of cancer treatment.** Cancer treatments that can cause vaginal dryness include:

- chemotherapy
- radiation to the pelvis or vagina
- surgery to the vagina or reproductive organs

## What will happen if my vagina is dry all the time?

Over time, dryness in the vagina can lead to:

- pain (especially when you have sex)
- burning
- itching
- higher chance of getting an infection in your vagina
- higher chance of getting an infection in your urinary tract (this includes your urethra, bladder, kidney)

It is important to keep your vagina moist, even if you are not having sex.

## What can I do to prevent vaginal dryness?

There are 2 things you can do:

- **Ask your doctor if you can take estrogen.** This will help reduce vaginal dryness and other menopause symptoms. Estrogen is not a safe option for women with some types of cancers.

Ask your doctor if you can take it. Doctors can prescribe estrogen as a pill that you take orally (swallow) or as cream or a ring that goes inside your vagina.

- **Use vaginal moisturizers and lubricants.** They will help make your vagina less dry and more comfortable. Vaginal moisturizers and lubricants will also help increase your pleasure during sex. You can buy these without a prescription. They are a safe and useful choice for most women.

Talk to your health care team if you have any questions or concerns.

## Types of Vaginal Moisturizers and Lubricants

Vaginal **moisturizers** are long-lasting. They keep your vagina moist all day. Vaginal **lubricants** last a short time. They are often used to give added moisture to your vagina just before sex or pleasuring.

Use vaginal moisturizers and lubricants to help you:

- prevent dryness
- increase pleasure during sex

You can use moisturizers and lubricants together, or just use 1.

Read the sections below to learn about each type.

Always follow the instructions that come with the product.

### Vaginal moisturizers

#### What is a vaginal moisturizer?

Vaginal moisturizers keep your vagina moist all day. They work much like the way normal body lotion does.

You may use normal body lotion to keep your skin smooth and moist all day. In the same way, you can use vaginal moisturizers to keep the inside of your vagina moist all day.

Unlike vaginal lubricants, vaginal moisturizers are not meant to be used just before sex.

## How do I use a vaginal moisturizer?

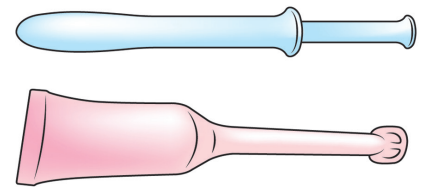
Use a vaginal moisturizer 2 to 3 times a week, even if you are not having sex. This will help keep your vagina healthy and comfortable.

There are different types of vaginal moisturizers. Follow the instructions on the package to make sure that you are using the moisturizer safely. You can buy vaginal moisturizers at most pharmacies.

## What are the different types of vaginal moisturizers?

There are 4 types of vaginal moisturizers:

- **Creams.** Replens and Zestica Moisture are examples of vaginal moisturizing creams. You can insert the cream into your vagina with an applicator 2 to 3 times per week.
- **Gels.** Gels are used in the same way as creams. They are usually a little bit lighter in colour and texture.
- **Suppositories.** Moisturizers also come in vaginal suppositories. Suppositories are like pills or capsules that you put inside your vagina. Do not swallow vaginal suppositories.
- **Natural oils.** Some examples of natural oils are:
  - natural Vitamin E liquid capsules
  - natural coconut oil
  - natural almond oil



Applicators



Suppositories

There are many different brands and types of vaginal lubricants. You can buy these at your local pharmacy. You can also find these in shops that sell sex-related products.

There are 3 main types of lubricants:

- water-based (see page 7)
- oil-based (see page 8)
- silicone-based (see page 10)

Read the section below to learn about each type.  
You can also find a summary table on page 12.

Vaginal lubricants will not prevent pregnancy  
or sexually transmitted infections (STI).

## **What is water-based lubricant?**

Water-based lubricants are the most common type of sexual lubricant. They can also be used to make it easier to insert dilators or tampons into your vagina. These are also the easiest kind of lubricant to find in a store. They are safe to use for most sex-related activities.

Water-based lubricants are the best option to use with:

- condoms
- diaphragms (a cup-shaped device inserted into the vagina to prevent pregnancy)
- rubber dams (a small thin rubber or latex sheet used as a barrier to help prevent sexually transmitted infections)
- other barrier ways of preventing pregnancy and infection

Water-based lubricants come in liquids, gels, and lotion styles. They can safely be used with vibrators and other sex toys.

If you get yeast infections often, use a lubricant that is glycerine-free. Glycerine breaks down to a sugar in the vagina. The sugar feeds the yeast in your body and may cause more to grow.

If you have sensitive skin, use water-based lubricant:

- with more organic or natural ingredients
- free of parabens (added chemicals), perfumes, flavours and colours

Water-based lubricants can dry up fast and become sticky. For this reason, it is not a very good choice for a body massage. If water-based lubricants dry up, you can add a little water or saliva to make it slippery again.

## **What are some product examples of water-based lubricants?**

You can find a very wide selection of brands of water-based lubricants. A few examples are:

- Astroglide
- O'My
- K-Y Brand
- Liquid Silk

## **What is oil-based lubricant?**

Oil stays moist and slippery for a long time because it does not absorb easily into your skin.

Oil-based lubricants are great for full-body and intimate massage (including breasts and genitals). They are also useful to use for manual stimulation (sexual stroking using the hand and fingers) of the penis and clitoris. Manual stimulation with a lubricant often feels very good for both men and women.

Do not use oil-based lubricant:

- **With latex condoms.** It will damage the latex. This will make it more likely for you to get pregnant or get an infection.
- **With sex toys.** The oil will damage the toy.
- **Inside your vagina.** Many oil-based products are very hard to wash off or to flush out of your body. Synthetic (non-natural) oils can stay in your vagina for days.

This can change the pH (acid) level in your vagina, making it easier for germs to grow. It can lead to infections in your vagina and urinary tract. One example of synthetic oil is petroleum jelly (Vaseline).

*Natural* oils (e.g. natural coconut or almond oils) are often safe to use inside your vagina as they are easier for the body to clear, but they should not be used with latex condoms or sex toys.

## **What are some product examples of oil-based lubricant?**

Some examples of oil-based lubricants are:

- natural Vitamin E liquid capsules
- natural coconut oil
- natural almond oil
- Yes!® Oil-based

As mentioned above, natural oils can be used inside your vagina since they are easier for the body to clear. They can be found at some pharmacies and grocery stores, and most health food stores.

Vitamin E oils are often sold in capsules. They can be found in the vitamin section of most pharmacies. You can poke a small hole in the Vitamin E capsule to get the oil on your fingers.

Specialty sexuality shops will carry many kinds of oil-based lubricants.



## What is silicone-based lubricant?

Silicone-based lubricant is the newest option of sexual lubricant. It stays slippery much longer than water-based lubricant. This is because unlike water, silicone does not:

- dry up in the air
- absorb into the skin
- absorb into the blood stream

It stays on the surface of your body and inside your vagina, making it last longer.

Silicone-based lubricant can be used during sexual pleasuring (including penetrative sex) and for massage. It can be applied to any part on the body that you want to caress or massage.

Silicone-based lubricant is a good option for women who:

- **Have sensitive skin.** Silicone is hypoallergenic (will not cause allergies).
- **Often get yeast infections.** Silicone will not change the pH (acid) level in the vagina. This keeps the yeast in control.
- **Often get urinary tract infections.** Silicone will not change the pH level in the urinary tract (urethra, bladder, kidney), so it does not increase your chance of getting a urinary tract infection.

Your body clears out silicone-based lubricant inside the vagina by itself.

To get rid of the slippery feeling on the outside of your body after use, wash off any extra lubricant with soap and water.

Silicone-based lubricant is safe to use with:

- condoms
- diaphragms (a cup-shaped device inserted into the vagina to prevent pregnancy)
- rubber dams (a small thin rubber or latex sheet used as a barrier to help prevent sexually transmitted infections)
- other barrier ways of preventing pregnancy and infection

**Do not use silicone-based lubricant with other products that are made of silicone, such as:**

- sex toys
- vibrators
- dilators

Over time, these products can become damaged by the silicone in the lubricant.

Silicone-based lubricants tend to cost more money than water-based lubricants. But compared to the water-base lubricants, you will need to use less because of this the same size bottle will last longer.

## **What are some product examples of silicone-based lubricants?**

Silicone-based lubricants are newer so there are fewer products to choose from. You can find more choices in stores that mainly sell sex-related products. Some examples of silicone-based lubricants include:

- Pjur
- Pink
- Wet Platinum

## List of lubricant options

Type	Features	Product examples
<b>Water-based</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Safe to use inside the body</li> <li>• Safe for use with condoms and sex toys</li> <li>• Many choices and easy to find</li> <li>• Can become sticky</li> </ul>	Astroglide®, O'My®, K-Y Brand®, Liquid Silk®
<b>Oil-based</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Longer lasting slippery feel, non-sticky</li> <li>• Great for full-body and sexual massage</li> <li>• Do not use synthetic (non-natural) oils inside the vagina</li> <li>• Do not use natural or synthetic oil with latex condoms and sex toys</li> </ul>	Yes!® Oil-based, Vitamin E oil, natural coconut oil, natural almond oil
<b>Silicone-based</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Safe to use inside the body</li> <li>• Safe for use with condoms</li> <li>• Will not dry up or get sticky</li> <li>• Needs soap and water to wash off outside of body</li> <li>• Do not use with silicone sex toys or dilators</li> </ul>	Pjur®, Pink®, Wet® Platinum

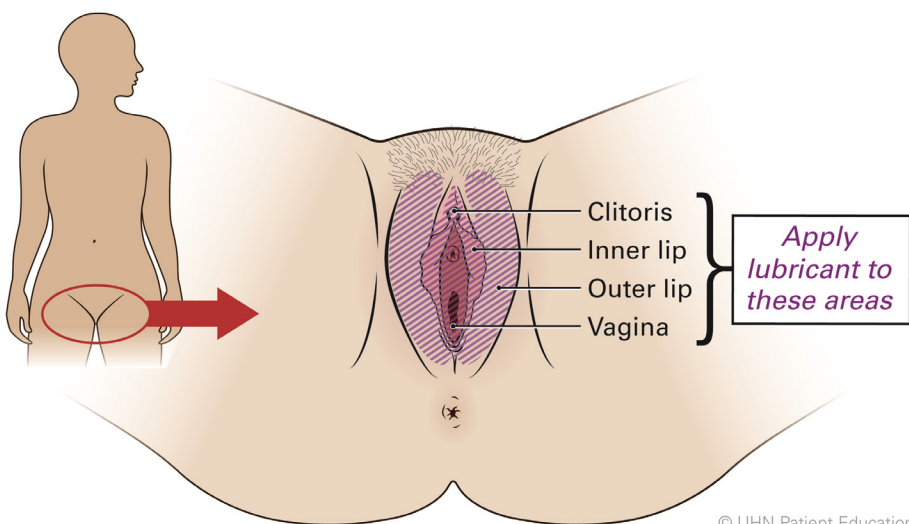
## How do I use a sexual lubricant?

**For use outside your vagina (on your body),** apply the lubricant the same way that you would apply a body lotion or massage oil:

1. Start by pouring a small amount into your hand. For water-based lubricants, pour about the size of a quarter. For oil and silicone-based lubricants, pour about the size of a nickel or dime.
2. Spread over the areas being pleasured (touched).
3. You can add more lubricant over time. You will likely need more if you are using a water-based lubricant. Water-based lubricants tend to dry up faster than the oils and silicone-based lubricants.

**For use inside your vagina,** use your fingers and hands to apply lubricant to:

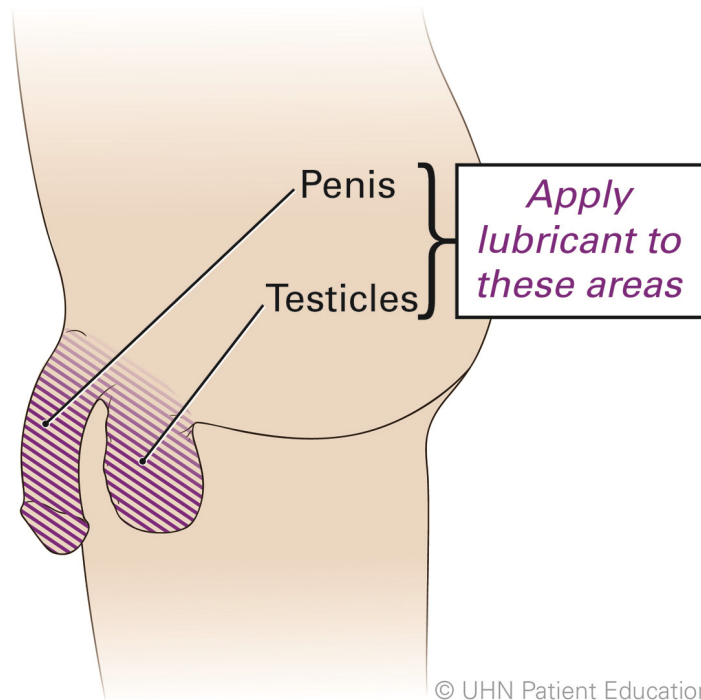
- Whatever is being inserted into your vagina (such a finger, penis, sex toy, dilator)
- The inner lips of your vagina
- The outer lips of your vagina
- Your clitoris



This will help make inserting something into the vagina more comfortable. It will also help you feel more aroused during sex and other sexual activities.

**For manual stimulation (masturbation) on a man,** use your fingers and hands to apply lubricant to the shaft of his penis and his testicles.

The lubricant allows the hand to glide more easily and quickly over the area. Stroking with lubricant can be highly arousing for many men.



## When to Get Medical Help



### Call your family doctor if:

- You notice any new or worrying:
  - discharge (fluid) coming out of your vagina
  - pain
  - smell
  - bleeding
- The pain or dryness in your vagina does not get better or gets worse.
- You have questions about when you can start having sex again after surgery or other treatment.
- You want to know whether it is safe for you to use hormonal treatment with vaginal moisturizers and lubricants.

**Important:** This is not a full list of brands or products. Southlake Regional Health Centre does not recommend one brand over another and is not responsible for any products listed. Please contact each company directly to find out more about their products.

Contact us to provide feedback or request this brochure in a different format, such as large print or electronic formats: [pfep@uhn.ca](mailto:pfep@uhn.ca)

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