

# Men's Use and Perceptions of Commercial Lubricants: Prevalence and Characteristics in a Nationally Representative Sample of American Adults

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## ABSTRACT

**Introduction.** Most research on men's use of commercial lubricants during sexual activities is in the context of condom use and often specifically among men who have sex with men. Less is known about men's use of lubricants associated with a broader range of sexual experiences.

**Aims.** The aims of this study are to document the prevalence of commercial lubricant use among adult U.S. men (age 18+), to document men's use of lubricants across solo and partnered sexual behaviors, and to assess men's perceptions of the contributions lubricants have to the sexual experience.

**Methods.** Data are from the 2012 National Survey of Sexual Health and Behavior, which involved the administration of an online questionnaire to a nationally representative probability sample of U.S. adults ages 18 and older.

**Main Outcome Measures.** Sociodemographic characteristics, recent and lifetime commercial lubricant use, lubricant use during specific sexual behaviors, frequency of lubricant use, and reasons for lubricant use.

**Results.** Most men in the United States (70%, N = 1,014) reported having used a commercial lubricant, with men older than 24 and those in a relationship more likely to report lubricant use. About one in four men had used a lubricant in the past 30 days. Intercourse was the most common behavior during which men used lubricant, though solo masturbation and partnered sexual play were also frequently linked to lubricant use. The most common reasons for lubricant use included "to make sex more comfortable," "for fun," "curiosity," and "my partner wanted to."

**Conclusions.** Most American men have used a lubricant; lubricant use is common across all age groups, and some of the most common reasons why men report using lubricants have to do with sexual enhancement, comfort, and pleasure. Clinicians may find these data helpful to their efforts to educate patients about lubricant use, comfort during sex, and sexual enhancement. **Reece M, Herbenick D, Schick V, Sanders SA, and Fortenberry JD. Men's use and perceptions of commercial lubricants: Prevalence and characteristics in a nationally representative sample of American adults. J Sex Med 2014;11:1125–1135.**

**Key Words.** Lubricant; Sexual Pleasure; Men's Sexual Health

## Introduction

Most research on men's use of commercial lubricants during sexual activities is in the context of condom use (i.e., the relation of lubricant use to condom breakage and slippage) and

often focuses on lubricant use among men who have sex with men (MSM), with greatest attention to condom use and receptive anal sex [1–5]. This research focus is important—especially as MSM remain disproportionately affected by sexually transmitted infections (including HIV) [6];

however, it often leaves out other aspects of men's sexual lives [7]. Further, it reinforces gendered stereotypes that men are sexually self-centered (or, at least, not involved in or responsible for the use of lubricant during male–female sexual encounters) and that lubrication and sexual penetration reflect a feminine gender role during partnered sexual experiences. Yet substantial research shows much more nuanced expressions of gender in partnered relationships and suggests a broader incorporation of sexual aids such as lubricants in men's sexual partnerships [8].

For example, many men in the United States prefer the feel of a “wet” rather than “dry” vagina during penile–vaginal intercourse [9], and many women prefer sex to feel wet as well [10]. Men with female sexual partners may choose lubricants to supplement vaginal wetness as many women experience vaginal dryness in connection with breastfeeding, menopause, some phases of the menstrual cycle, and various health conditions [11–13]. Although sexual health educators and clinicians often recommend lubricant use during anal sex, men's and women's preferences for anal sex that is more wet or dry have not been well researched and remain poorly understood. Lubricants may also be chosen for using during sexual activities to decrease pain, increase comfort, as well as to increase a partner's pleasure and satisfaction with sex [9,12–14]. Also, women commonly indicate that they first began using lubricant during sexual activities because of a partner's suggestion, highlighting the role of couple interactions in sexual decision making [15].

In recent years, commercial lubricants have become more widely marketed and are commonly available in mainstream retail stores and drug stores in the United States [16,17]. Widespread emphasis on men's condom use may also have influenced greater acceptability of lubricant use given that most condoms are prelubricated, typically with silicone lubricant.

Although there is a small but growing body of literature related to women's use of lubricant during sexual activities for sexual enhancement as well as for pain reduction [10–15], there is less research about men's use of lubricants outside the context of sex between men and HIV risk. However, many men may use lubricant for a variety of solo and partnered sexual experiences. Men may use lubricant while they masturbate alone or with a partner, during foreplay or partnered sex play, during vaginal or anal intercourse, and—given the availability of flavored

lubricant—perhaps during oral sex as well. It is important to understand more about men's lubricant use for several reasons: (i) to learn more about men's sexuality apart from a risk-focused model; (ii) to understand more about how men choose to modulate their sexual experiences to enhance their or their sexual partner's arousal, comfort, and/or orgasm; and (iii) to assess how men feel about lubricant use. The latter points, in particular, may be important in understanding men's willingness to use lubricant either to enhance their own sexual experiences or to be responsive to their sexual partner's needs (related to pain reduction or pleasure) and desires.

### Aim

The purpose of these analyses, which are based on data from the 2012 National Survey of Sexual Health and Behavior (2012 NSSHB), is to document the prevalence of commercial lubricant use among adult men (age over 18 years) in the United States, to document men's use of lubricants across solo and partnered sexual behaviors, and to assess men's perceptions of the contributions lubricants have to the sexual experience.

### Methods

This article presents data from the 2012 NSSHB, a population-based cross-sectional survey of adults in the United States. Data were collected during October to November 2012 via the KnowledgePanel of GfK Custom Research (GfK) (Menlo Park, California). Research panels accessed through GfK's KnowledgePanel are based on a national probability sample established using both random digit dialing and an address-based sampling (ABS) frame. ABS involves the probability sampling of a frame of residential addresses in the United States derived from the U.S. Postal Service's Delivery Sequence File, a system that contains detailed information on every mail-deliverable address in the United States. Collectively, the sampling frame from which participants are recruited covers approximately 98% of all U.S. households. Randomly selected addresses are recruited to the research panel through a series of mailings and subsequently by telephone follow-ups to nonresponders when possible. To further correct sources of sampling and nonsampling error, study samples are corrected with a poststratification adjustment using demographic distributions from the most recent data available

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