

Characteristics of Condom and Lubricant Use among a Nationally Representative Probability Sample of Adults Ages 18–59 in the United States

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ABSTRACT

Introduction. Although most Americans have used condoms and/or lubricant during sex, little is known about the context of sexual events that involve the use of such products outside of experimentally manipulated studies.

Aims. To assess, in a nationally representative study of men and women in the United States ages 18–59, the characteristics of condom and lubricant use during participants' most recent sexual event and the relationship of their condom and lubricant use to event-level ratings of sexual quality.

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

Main Outcome Measures. Sociodemographic items: event-level items related to sexual behavior, condom use, lubricant use, and participants' perceptions of their arousal, pleasure, ease of erection or lubrication, and pain associated with sex.

Results. During their most recent sexual experience, 27.5% of men (N = 237) and 22.3% of women (N = 175) reported using a condom. More than twice as many women as men were unsure whether the condom was lubricated (26.6% vs. 11.4%) and the material it was made of (23.6% vs. 8.9%). Participants consistently rated sex to be arousing and pleasurable whether or not they used condoms or lubricant. No significant differences were found in regard to men's ratings of the ease of their erections based on condom and lubricant use.

Conclusions. Although some have concerns about how condoms or lubricants may impact their enjoyment of sex, in a nationally representative sample of men and women ages 18–59, ratings of sex were largely quite high, with few differences based on condom and lubricant use. Women, more often than men, reported being unsure about the type of condom and lubricant used, which has implications for patient education. **Herbenick D, Schick V, Reece M, Sanders SA, Smith N, Dodge B, and Fortenberry JD. Characteristics of condom and lubricant use among a nationally representative probability sample of adults ages 18–59 in the United States. J Sex Med 2013;10:474–483.**

Key Words. Condom; Lubricant; Sexual Quality; Sexual Pleasure; Orgasm; Sexual Function

Introduction

Human sexual experiences are dynamic and diverse. Numerous details can vary in any given partnered sexual event—for example, body positioning, gender composition of partners, the relationship of partners to one another, and the

type and sequence of sexual events, as well as the degree to which people are naked or clothed, like or love each other, or want to please one another (among many other factors). In addition, humans use tools that they invent to protect themselves during sex, excite themselves or their partner, or to enhance their erotic experiences. For example,

men and women may adjust the lighting in a room, take medications prior to sex, apply topical creams or lotions, or use clothing, sex toys (e.g., vibrators and penile rings), condoms, or lubricants as part of sex.

Two products that are commonly used by men and women in the United States during partnered sexual events are condoms and lubricants. Condom use is prevalent in the United States with about 25% of men and about 20% of women reporting using a condom during their most recent sexual experience that included vaginal intercourse [1]. Lubricant use is also common, with 62% of women reporting having ever used lubricant during sexual activities [2].

Such products may be incorporated into men's and women's sexual activities for a number of reasons. Condoms are largely used in order to reduce the risk of pregnancy and/or sexually transmissible infections (STIs), but certain types of condoms may also be used to delay ejaculation or to modulate a couple's sexual experience, as in the case of those that feature warming or cooling lubricant on the condom [3,4].

Lubricant may also be used for various reasons. It is often used to facilitate comfortable vaginal and anal intercourse and is commonly recommended for women who are postmenopausal, breastfeeding, or prone to discomfort or pain during sex [5,6]. There are also pleasure-related reasons that people choose to use lubricant. In a recent prospective, double masked trial of six water-based and silicone-based lubricants assigned for use during women's masturbation, vaginal sex, and anal sex, lubricant use was found—in within-subject comparisons—to be associated with more pleasurable and satisfying ratings of sex as compared with sexual events that occurred without a lubricant [7].

In addition to facilitating more comfortable and pleasurable sex, some studies have found that, when used in conjunction with a condom, the use of lubricants compatible with latex condoms may reduce the risk of condom breakage [8,9]. However, the use of oil-based or petroleum-based lubricating products in combination with latex condoms has been shown to increase the risk of condom breakage [10]. Lubricant use has also been associated with increased risk for condom slippage, perhaps due to the amount of lubricant used or its placement in relation to the condom (e.g., adding too much lubricant to the penis prior to condom application) [11,12].

In recent years, lubricants have become more widely available in mainstream retail stores and

advertising for lubricants has become more visible in mainstream media, including television [13,14]. This, in conjunction with the fact that most condoms come prelubricated and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention commonly recommends that lubricant be added to condoms [15], suggests that more information is needed about how sexual events that involve condoms and/or lubricants are experienced. Lubricant use among women, and among male–female couples, is particularly poorly understood, as much of the lubricant-related literature is related to the use of lubricant among men who have sex with men in the context of condom efficacy related to anal sex [16–18].

Although a number of characteristics of condom use have been identified, little is known about the context of sexual events that involve lubricant use or that involve both a condom and lubricant. Aside from the one prospective clinical trial of lubricant use among women (described earlier), little is known about individuals' perceptions of sexual events that involve lubricant (or condoms and lubricant) in naturally occurring rather than experimentally manipulated events.

Aims

The purpose of this study was to, in a nationally representative study of men and women in the United States ages 18–59, assess the characteristics of condom and lubricant use during participants' most recent sexual event and to explore the relationship of condom and lubricant use to participant event-level reports of sexual pleasure, arousal, ease of erectile function or vaginal lubrication, difficulty with pain, and orgasm.

Methods

Data presented are from the National Survey of Sexual Health and Behavior (NSSHB), conducted during early 2009 and described in greater detail elsewhere [1,19–27]. NSSHB data were collected using a population-based cross-sectional survey in the United States via research panels of Knowledge Networks (Menlo Park, CA, USA). Research panels accessed through Knowledge Networks are based on a national probability sample established using 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, which contains

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