

Lubricants and moisturizers are simple, hormone-free products that relieve vaginal dryness, irritation, and discomfort with sex. They are a first-line option, available without a prescription, and they can be used on their own or alongside vaginal estrogen. The two do different jobs — it helps to know which to reach for.

Lubricant vs. Moisturizer

- **Lubricant** — used **at the time of sex** for immediate slipperiness and to reduce friction and pain. Short-acting; reapply as needed.
- **Moisturizer** — used **regularly** (every few days), whether or not you're having sex, to keep the tissue hydrated over time.

Many people use **both**: a moisturizer for everyday comfort and a lubricant during intimacy.

Choosing a Type

- **Water-based** — widely compatible (condoms, toys); may need reapplying.
- **Silicone-based** — longer-lasting, good for dryness; avoid with silicone toys.
- **Oil-based** — long-lasting but **can weaken latex condoms**.

LEARN THE TERMS

Lubricant

A product used during sex to reduce friction.

Moisturizer

A product used regularly to hydrate the tissue over time.

Water-based

Versatile and condom/toy-friendly; may need reapplying.

Silicone-based

Longer-lasting; not for use with silicone toys.

GSM

Menopausal dryness/thinning — a common reason for dryness.

Osmolality

A property of some products that, if very high, can irritate — gentler ones are preferred.

DO I STILL NEED ESTROGEN? Not necessarily. For many people, lubricants and moisturizers are enough — and they're a great choice if you prefer to avoid hormones or can't use them. If dryness is from menopause and these aren't enough, **vaginal estrogen** can be added; the two work well together.

How to Use Them

- **Lubricant:** apply generously to yourself and your partner just before and during sex; reapply as needed.
- **Moisturizer:** use on a **regular schedule** (often every 2–3 days), not just for sex.
- Match the type to your needs and to condoms/toys you use.

Choosing Gentle Products

- Prefer products that are **unscented** and free of warming/tingling additives, which can irritate.
- If one product stings or irritates, switch — sensitivities vary.
- When using **latex condoms**, avoid oil-based products.

See your provider if you have:

- Dryness or irritation that **doesn't improve** with these products
- Burning, unusual **discharge**, or itching (possible infection)
- Any **bleeding**, especially after menopause or after sex

Good to Know

- These are safe for long-term, regular use.
- They can also ease discomfort during pelvic exams.

THREE THINGS TO REMEMBER

1. Lubricants are for **during sex**; moisturizers are used **regularly** to hydrate the tissue — many people use both.
2. Pick a type that fits your needs and your condoms/toys (avoid oil-based with latex; silicone not with silicone toys).
3. They're hormone-free and safe long-term, and pair well with vaginal estrogen. See your provider for persistent irritation or any bleeding.