

Sex and the supermarket

The condom aisle isn't just for condoms anymore

22
TESTED
7
SMART
PICKS

You can't watch TV these days without seeing some satisfied-looking couple stretched out in bed, smiling as if they know a secret. Often their secret turns out to be a "personal lubricant" or another

product you never thought you'd see advertised before midnight. And if you haven't seen the condom display at your local supermarket lately, that might also raise an eyebrow or two. In addition to the

CHECK IT OUT
Our tests show that some condoms are more reliable than others.



usual suspects, you can find things like vibrating rings and arousal gels. These are now so mainstream that you can find store brands and even coupons in the Sunday paper.

“The taboo has been lifted, because you no longer have to go to a ‘sleazy’ adult store,” says Sari Locker, Ph.D., author of “The Complete Idiot’s Guide to Amazing Sex” (Alpha, 2005). “When you shop for shampoo and toothpaste, you can also buy things like tingling lubricant and arousal gel.”

We did some shopping to see exactly what you can buy at your local grocery store or drugstore. Turn the page for a roundup of items and what you need to know about them. We also surveyed more than 1,000 Americans about buying sex products; check out our stats about who’s using what and where they’re shopping on page 59. And don’t miss the results of our latest condom tests on page 58.

But first, here’s a little Q&A for sex-product shoppers:

What’s the deal with all of those lubricants for sale?

Baby boomers are entering a dry spell, so to speak. Vaginal dryness starts to become an issue in the years during and after menopause. That’s about the time when your ovaries slow the production of estrogen, which keeps tissues in the vagina moist and lubricated. Some women experience painful dryness all the time, not just during sex. Vaginal dryness might also be a problem if you’re nursing or taking certain medications.

There are so many kinds of condoms. What’s that all about?

It’s all about variety! You can buy plain, contoured, studded, and even glow-in-the-dark condoms. There are

dozens of varieties, but also differences in reliability, as you’ll see. And just as important as picking a reliable condom is using it correctly. Even if you’ve been using them for years, you should check out the instructions before tossing the box next time. Follow those carefully and remember to use only silicone or water-based lubricants like KY Jelly. Petroleum-based lubricants like Vaseline and baby oil can eat right through the latex.

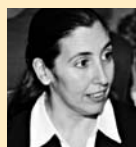
Are there any other items you might want to avoid?

Some condoms come with Nonoxynol-9, a spermicidal lubricant that used to be more common. It’s fallen out of favor in recent years because it can cause irritation, urinary tract infections, and even vaginal tears that could increase the risk of contracting HIV. You can still find it in a few condoms, but none of the ones we tested has it.

What if you’re embarrassed about perusing the sex-products aisle?

Trojan Brand research shows that many of us hurry through the condom-shopping process. But it pays to take your time and read labels. “All of the lubricants are laid out on the shelves next to the condoms, so you don’t have to ask anyone,” says Judith Reichman, M.D., author of “I’m Not in the Mood: What Every Woman Should Know About Improving Her Libido” (Harper Paperbacks, 1999). If you’re shy, consider this: We sent one of our male secret shoppers to buy all the condoms we tested—more than 15,000 in all! Even though he was buying them by the hundreds—scooping up dozens of boxes at a time—he barely got a glance from the store cashiers. If they weren’t wondering what he was up to, they’re not wondering about you at all!

QUICK CONSULT



Judi Chervenak, M.D., associate clinical professor of ob/gyn and women’s health at Montefiore Medical Center in New York

There are so many lubricants to choose from. What should you be looking for?

It depends on the person. Lubricants that warm on contact might be pleasurable for some women but might not be right for everyone. In my practice, women with vaginal dryness often have bothersome hot flashes, and a feeling of warmth in the vagina may not be a plus for them.

What if someone feels awkward about trying a lubricant?

Ninety percent of postmenopausal women experience dryness, but only

10 percent get treated. If you have vaginal dryness, you have to address it. A condom on a penis in a dry vagina: it’s going to hurt, and it’s going to take away from the joy of sex. If you can erase the pain, you’re going to feel sexier.

We see that the Today Sponge is back. Do you recommend it?

First, realize it’s not going to prevent STDs. Second, it may not be the most effective form of birth control. But it’s certainly a viable option for many.

Any shopping tips for trying a new condom or lubricant?

Get a trial-size package to see if it works for you. What works for someone else might not give you ecstatic joy.

A shopper’s guide to sex products

The scoop on everything you’ll find on store shelves and more.*



PERSONAL LUBRICANTS

Even if you don’t usually have a dryness problem, lubricants are good to keep around. Problems might crop up if you’re taking an antihistamine for a cold, for example, because those drugs dry out tissues throughout your body. Some of the products you’ve probably seen advertised lately and might have wondered about include K-Y Yours + Mine (sexual lubricants for couples), Intrigue (a long-lasting silicone-based lubricant), and Liquibeads (not made just for sexual encounters, it’s an insert containing a vaginal moisturizer that lasts up to four days).

Shopping tip Consider the type of sensation you prefer. Silicone-based lubricants have a more slippery feel, while water-based ones allow for more friction and are easier to rinse off.



WARMING AGENTS

You can buy warming lubricants such as Astroglide Warming Liquid (\$6.50 for 2.5 ounces) and K-Y’s Sensual Silk Warming (\$6.89 for 4.5 ounces), or condoms that contain a warming lubricant, such as Lifestyles Warming Pleasure (see next page). Most contain glycerine, which releases heat from the body when it comes into contact with moist skin. That mimics the feeling of blood rushing to a certain body part, which is why it can be pleasurable. Some of these products contain menthol, which can create a warming sensation in some people and a cooling feeling in others (no, we’re not sure why you’d want that either).

Shopping tip Warming agents come in many forms: condoms, mists, liquids, and massage products.



NEW KINDS OF CONDOMS

The selection goes way beyond ribbed, non-ribbed, latex, and lambskin. Today’s condoms have all kinds of bells and whistles (almost literally!) **Climax control** Lined with a numbing lubricant like benzocaine to keep it all from being over too quickly. **Mega/Magnum** Code words for “supersized.”

Tingling Contains menthol, acacia honey, or other ingredients to provide a heating or cooling sensation on contact.

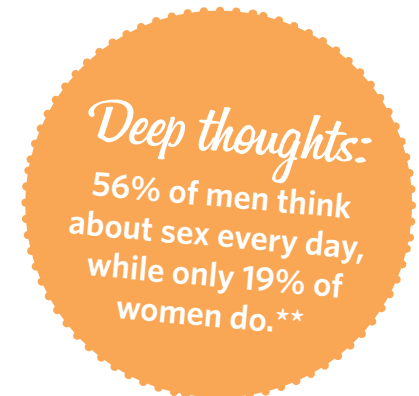
Vibrating ring A studded silicone ring with a battery inside fits at the base of the condom and promises to deliver pleasurable sensations to both partners.

Shopping tip If you’re shy about standing in the store aisle reading the box, go online to do your research beforehand. The manufacturers’ Web sites are fonts of information. Some even have coupons you can print out.



FEMALE CONDOM

Female condoms have been sold for years but they never really caught on, accounting for just 0.2 percent of all condom use worldwide. The FC female condom costs about \$3 apiece and is



sold in drugstores. And there’s a new version due out by the end of the year, which should cost close to \$2.

Shopping tip When FC2 hits store shelves, try the less expensive version first. The female condom is made of polyurethane, so latex allergies shouldn’t be an issue. Just be sure to practice using it before a sexual encounter; it takes time to learn to insert it properly.



THE SPONGE

You may remember the Today contraceptive sponge from years back or from “Seinfeld,” when Elaine declared a date “spongeworthy.” It’s now back. The sponge costs about \$15 for three and contains nonoxynol-9 spermicide, so it prevents pregnancy

Plain brown wrappers

If you’d rather shop from the privacy of home, you can find condoms and many other sex products at these Web sites:

- **Amazon.com** has customer reviews of many products in its Health & Personal Care section. Go there and click on Sexual Wellness.
- **Condomania.com** can suggest products. Try its Condom Wizard and Lucy Lube interactive tools.
- **CVS.com** has a Sexual Health section, and at **drugstore.com**, the Sexual Well-Being section offers discounts on featured products.
- **Babeland.com** and **goodvibes.com** are women-owned, women-operated sex stores, recommended by “sexpert” Pepper Schwartz.

*We did not test these products in our labs, except condoms (see page 58).

**2008 poll by the Consumer Reports National Research Center.

non-hormonally, by “deactivating” sperm on contact. But as we said before, the spermicide can cause irritation.
Shopping tip If you become a sponge user, consider joining the SpongeWorthy Club at todaysponge.com for discounts.



PLAN B ONE-STEP
 Condom broke? This one-dose pill can help prevent an unwanted pregnancy. Typically referred to as the “morning after pill,” Plan B is what’s called emergency contraception. It contains high doses of the hormone levonorgestrel, which is in many birth control pills. If you take it

within 72 hours after intercourse—the sooner the better—Plan B can prevent the ovaries from releasing an egg, stop an egg from being fertilized, or block a fertilized egg from becoming implanted in the uterus. (Unlike the controversial prescription drug RU-486, which many people confuse with Plan B, this over-the-counter medication will not cause expulsion of an implanted fertilized egg.) Plan B costs about \$50 and is now sold at drugstores, so you don’t have to ask a doctor or clinic for it (as long as you’re older than 17).
Shopping tip Can’t find Plan B on the shelf? Ask your pharmacist; it’s kept behind the counter.



AROUSAL GEL
 Think extra stimulation. According to Durex, maker of Utopia gel, only 32 percent of women regularly achieve orgasm during intercourse, but 79 percent did while using its product (\$15.95 for 0.51 fluid ounces). LifeStyles X2 condoms contain Excite arousal gel inside and out (\$1 apiece, 12 per box). (We did not test these.)
Shopping tip Check sex-product labels for an ingredient called L-Arginine. It helps to increase blood flow, which may lead to a more enjoyable sexual encounter when applied to the clitoris. (It’s in the Durex Utopia.)

top condoms

We tested more than 500 samples of 22 condom models. An outside lab inflated them like balloons until they burst to test for strength and reliability. They also submerged them in saline solution zapped with electricity to check for holes. All passed our minimum requirements based on standards for reliability, holes, and packaging. But some

of them held a lot more air than others before exploding—as much as 45 liters (the equivalent of about 23 party-size bottles of Coke!). Models that aced the test are listed below in price order. Also, we didn’t find a single hole or tear in any of our Smart Picks; industry standards allow for a certain number of defects per batch.



LIFESTYLES ULTRA SENSITIVE
Price per condom 71 cents (12 per box)
Why we like it A nice combination of performance and simplicity, this untextured, unadorned model is a solid choice for couples who want a plain, reliable condom. It’s among the thinnest we tested, possibly a plus if you’re looking for extra sensitivity.



LIFESTYLES WARMING PLEASURE
Price per condom 75 cents (12 per box)
Why we like it Warming lubricant is claimed to heat up on contact. (It contains acacia honey, an ingredient in some “warming” or “tingling” adult products.) It’s also described as thin, but it was about average in thickness.



TROJAN ULTRA THIN
Price per condom 84 cents (12 per box)
Why we like it It’s even thinner than the LifeStyles Ultra Sensitive but no less strong—and not to be confused with the Trojan ThinTensity (80 cents), which we also tested and is also a fine choice.



TROJAN MAGNUM
Price per condom 86 cents (12 per box)
Why we like it A good choice for larger men, this condom was among the widest we tested. And it comes in a manly black box that any guy would be proud to present at the checkout counter.



DUREX PERFORMAX
Price per condom 96 cents (12 per box)
Why we like it This condom is thinner than most and the lubricant on the inside contains benzocaine, a mild numbing ingredient that is marketed as a way to delay a man’s climax. (No, we didn’t test that.)



TROJAN HER PLEASURE ECSTASY
Price per condom \$1.10 (10 per box)
Why we like it Creative design: It gets wider toward the tip, which may provide more comfort for the guy. And it’s ribbed all around the base (the “her pleasure” part).



TROJAN ULTRA RIBBED ECSTASY
Price per condom \$1.10 (10 per box)
Why we like it It’s identical in shape to the Trojan Her Pleasure Ecstasy but with even more ribs, which are not just around the base but also around the top.



NIGHT LIGHT GLOW-IN-THE-DARK Yes, it glowed in the dark but it was the weakest we tested: Fewer than half of the samples made it to 25 liters of air before exploding, which might mean a greater risk of breaking during use. And too many had holes.

ALLERGIC TO LATEX?

If you’re one of the millions of people who are allergic to latex, you now have better condom options than natural lambskin, which prevents pregnancy but not STDs. Several companies make condoms out of non-latex synthetic materials. We looked at two of them—LifeStyles SKYN, made of polyisoprene, and Trojan Supra, made of polyurethane. Since there are no industry standards for testing them, we can’t say how they compare with latex in terms of strength and reliability. But we found them to be free of holes and package defects. The LifeStyles SKYN condoms cost \$1.07 apiece; the Trojan Supra, \$1.64.



Let’s talk about sex

We asked more than 1,000 men and women across the country about their sex-product purchases, and most of them didn’t even hang up on us! Here’s what we learned in this new, exclusive ShopSmart poll.

The blush factor
36% of adults said they are not at all embarrassed to buy sex-related products.
30% of adults said they are somewhat or very embarrassed (**37%** of all women said that, compared with **23%** of men).

Where we’re shopping
85% of folks who buy condoms purchased them at a supermarket, drugstore, or discount store.
65% of lubricant shoppers buy them at those stores (46% purchase massage oils there).
67% buy sexual pleasure products online or at specialty stores.

Married people were more likely than singles to use lubricating and massage oils, and—surprise!—they were just as likely to use condoms.

What’s in the nightstand
 In the past year:
34% of men and **23%** of women used lubricants during sex.
32% of men and **17%** of women used condoms.
26% of men and **13%** of women used massage oils.
17% of men and **8%** of women used other products to enhance sexual pleasure or performance.

Who’s buying?
 Not surprisingly, women buy most of the lubricants, and men do the vast majority of condom buying. Just **17%** of condom users relied on their partner to purchase them.