

# healthCHAT 1

## Lubrication

### What?!

Lubrication is the naturally occurring fluids made by a woman's body when she is sexually excited.

### Why?!

Lubrication makes the vagina wet and eases the entry of the penis during sex. Without this, the vagina is dry and sex can be difficult and painful. Dry sex can cause condoms and skin to tear, putting both partners at risk for HIV. Lubrication helps to make sex more enjoyable and safe.

Many of us believe that thoughts and discussions about sexual health and practices should be private.

**But our sexual health is not private!**

It is greatly influenced by very public matters, like:

long-held cultural beliefs and the development of new technologies

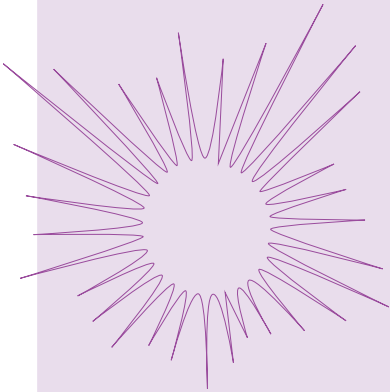
If cultural norms are increasing the risk of HIV infection and decreasing the pleasure of sex, we must take action!

If new technologies are being developed that could save women's lives,

**we must take action!**

# How?!

- Dry sex is popular in some places, but it is putting women and men at risk for HIV infection.
- Women should avoid using herbs and other substances to dry the vagina.
- The vagina naturally creates its own lubrication when a woman is sexually aroused. Spending time kissing and touching is a great way to increase both partners' pleasure and to ensure that the woman is ready for sex and that her vagina is lubricated.
- A woman or her partner can stimulate the vagina with his/her hand until the vagina is moist.



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## **Lubrication is different for different women, if there is not enough lubrication produced naturally you can also use:**

- Saliva which is also a natural lubricant – apply it with a hand to the vagina.
- Some male condoms and all female condoms come pre-lubricated. Look for these!
- There are some gels available at the store, usually they are called “personal lubricants”. They closely match the woman’s own natural lubricant and are easy to use.
- Avoid using household products (petroleum jelly, baby oil, vegetable oil) as a lubricant – these may not be healthy for the woman and the oils in them can cause a condom to tear or become weak.

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# healthCHAT 2

## Microbicides

### What?!

A microbicide is a product (gel, cream, sponge, film) that a woman can use in her vagina or anus before sex to prevent HIV and other STIs. Scientists are still developing microbicides and they are not yet available for use.

### Why?!

A microbicide prevents STIs and HIV from entering a **woman's body**

by forming a **protective barrier** in her vagina, preventing a woman from being infected by her partner.

One big advantage of **microbicides**

is that women could choose to **protect themselves** without having to tell their partner or get their permission or cooperation.

This is especially important because **many women** do not have enough **power** in their relationships to negotiate safer sex.

Is 'microbicides' a new word to you?

Here's how to pronounce it:

*my-kro-ba-sides*

# Is it true that women can use lime or lemon juice to protect themselves from HIV infection?

No. It is a myth that lime or lemon juice used in a woman's vagina will protect her from HIV. In fact, new research shows that it can even make it easier for HIV to enter the body. This is because the juice is so acidic that it can create small abrasions on the walls of the vagina, making it easier for the virus to enter the bloodstream.

## How?!

Because there are several different kinds of microbicides being developed, step-by-step instructions are not yet available. But they work in 1 of 3 ways depending on the type:

1. killing the virus
2. blocking infection by creating a barrier that blocks transmission
3. preventing infection from taking hold after it has entered the body.

## Do?!

Activists and healthcare providers are working hard to ensure that microbicides become a reality for women all over the world. We can help them by:

- Spread the word about how important microbicides are for the prevention of HIV infection, tell your friends!
- Ask your health care providers or government officials how you can get involved in the advocacy for microbicides.
- Have your organization endorse the Global Campaign for Microbicides, as an individual, sign the petition to support microbicide research ([www.global-campaign.org](http://www.global-campaign.org)).

(Adapted from Global Campaign for Microbicides [www.global-campaign.org](http://www.global-campaign.org))

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# healthCHAT 3

## Discussing Testing

### What?!

Discussing HIV and STI testing with your partner is a necessary step in an open and healthy relationship. It involves imagining the conversation with your partner and what your responses to their reactions will be.

### Why?!

Knowing your and your partner's status is vital to staying healthy. If you and/or your partner are HIV negative, you can plan together how you will stay safe. If you and/or your partner are HIV positive, you can begin learning about HIV treatment options and how to prevent others in your family from being exposed to the virus. If one of you is positive and the other negative, you can decide together how to protect each other and stay safe.

### How?!

How could you open up the issue of testing with your partner?

Some ways you might begin are:

- “There is so much talk of HIV these days. I think we should get tested to be sure we are healthy.”
- “I am worried about our health. I'd like us to go and speak to a counsellor about testing for HIV and other STIs?”
- “People in the community, and even the religious leaders, are talking about HIV testing. Have you thought about going together to be tested?”

Think about how your partner might respond and what you could say in response:

Partner: If we have HIV, then you brought it to us!

You: It isn't time to begin blaming, all I'm saying is that we should know our status.

Partner: Why do you want to be tested? Do you think I'm infected?

You: I don't know, I hope we are both healthy, but if we don't know the truth, we can't keep ourselves healthy.

Partner: Why are you worried about HIV? Are you having sex with other people?

You: No, I am only having sex with you, but I still want to know our status.

(Adapted from *Risk Reduction Counseling for Women Experiencing Violence*, 2006, Rakai Health Sciences Program, Uganda)

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