

Vaginal Lubricant Use Among Women Trying to Conceive: Insights From a Survey of Over 1000 Participants

Sarah Johnson, Pauline Parsons, Lorrae Marriott, Marika Reay
SPD Development Company Ltd, Bedford, United Kingdom.

Introduction

- Personal lubricants are frequently used by women to relieve vaginal dryness and enhance sexual experience
- However, not all personal lubricants are suitable for women who are trying to conceive, as some have been reported to interfere with sperm motility and viability, thereby decreasing the chances of natural conception^{1,2}

Study objectives

- To assess the prevalence of lubricant use in women of reproductive age who are actively trying to conceive
- To understand whether vaginal dryness is a common problem in women trying to conceive, and whether women may benefit from a 'fertility-friendly' personal lubricant to facilitate comfortable intercourse

Study design

- Cross-sectional survey

Materials and methods

- A postal-based survey was conducted in 1540 women aged 18 years and older who were actively trying to conceive
- Women were recruited via the internet from across the UK
- Volunteers completed a questionnaire consisting of eight questions relating to the presence of vaginal discomfort during sex and the use of vaginal lubricants, both currently and at varying points in their lifetime

Results

- Participant demographics are shown in Table 1

Table 1. Demographics of study participants

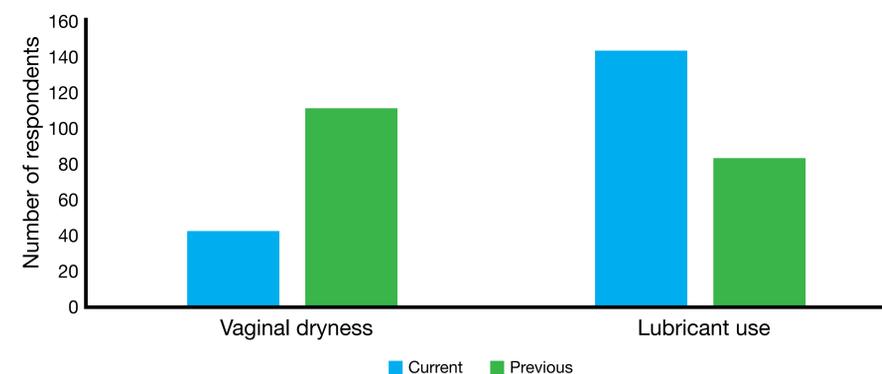
Age, years	
Mean	30
Range	18–47
Age group, n (%)	
18–25 years	334 (21.7)
26–30 years	501 (32.5)
31–35 years	452 (29.4)
36–40 years	197 (12.8)
41–45 years	54 (3.5)
Not answered	2 (0.1)
Ethnicity, n (%)	
Hispanic, Latino or other Spanish descent	33 (2.1)
NOT Hispanic, Latino or other Spanish descent	1507 (97.9)
Not answered	0 (0.0)
Race, n (%)	
Asian	56 (3.6)
Black	49 (3.2)
White	1384 (89.9)
Mixed	51 (3.3)
Other	0 (0.0)

Cycle length, days	
Mean	29.47
Range	15–62
Length of time trying to conceive, months	
Mean	14
Range	1–192
Suffer from PCOS, n (%)	
Yes	258 (16.8)
No	1282 (83.2)
Not answered	0 (0.0)
Smoking status, n (%)	
Current	205 (13.3)
Previous	492 (31.9)
Never	826 (53.6)
Not answered	17 (1.1)
Number of acts of intercourse in study cycle, n	
Mean	10
Range	0–53

PCOS, polycystic ovary syndrome

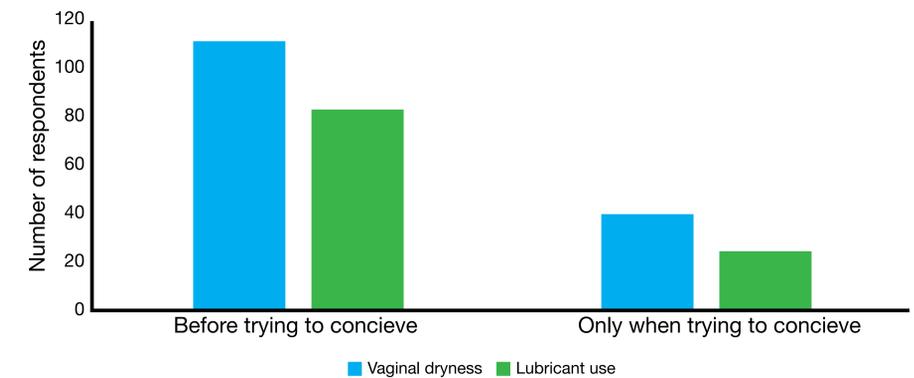
- Approximately 10% of participants reported using a vaginal lubricant at the time of the survey (9.2%; 142/1540) (Figure 1)
 - However, just under 3% of participants (2.7%; 42/1540) reported suffering from vaginal dryness or discomfort during sex at this time

Figure 1. Reported prevalence of current and previous vaginal dryness/ discomfort during sex and of lubricant use



- Approximately one in ten participants (10.3%; 158/1540) reported that they had suffered from vaginal dryness or discomfort during sex at some point in their lifetime (Figure 1)
- Approximately 5% of participants (5.3%; 82/1540) reported using a lubricant before trying to conceive (Figure 1)
- Almost 3% of participants (2.5%; 39/1540) stated that they had suffered from vaginal dryness when trying to conceive in the past, and 1.6% of participants (24/1540) reported using a lubricant at that time
- Thirty-nine (2.5%) and 24 (1.6%) participants, respectively, reported only suffering from vaginal dryness or discomfort during sex and using lubricants while trying to conceive (Figure 2)

Figure 2. Reported prevalence of vaginal dryness/ discomfort during sex and of lubricant use while trying to conceive and before trying to conceive



Conclusions

- This study found that approximately 10% of women who are actively trying to conceive use personal lubricants; however, this study did not explore whether women were selecting 'fertility friendly' lubricants whilst trying to conceive
- The proportion of those using vaginal lubricants exceeds the proportion of women suffering from vaginal discomfort/dryness
 - This observation could suggest that personal lubricant use serves additional purposes rather than simply alleviating vaginal discomfort
- 'Fertility-friendly' lubricants allow women who are actively trying to conceive to enhance their sexual experience without reducing the chances of pregnancy. Therefore, given the prevalence of lubricant use, information that only 'fertility friendly' lubricants should be used whilst trying to conceive, should be readily available to couples trying to conceive

Study funding/competing interest(s)

This study was funded by SPD Development Company Ltd. (Bedford, UK), a fully owned subsidiary of SPD Swiss Precision Diagnostics (Geneva, Switzerland). SJ, PP, LM and MR are employees of SPD Development Company Ltd.

References

- Mowat A, et al. The effects of vaginal lubricants on sperm function: an in vitro analysis. J Assist Reprod Genet. (2014) 31: 333–9.
- Mesen TB, Steiner AZ. Effect of vaginal lubricants on natural fertility. Curr Opin Obstet Gynecol. (2014) 26: 186–92.

