



## Counselling women about lubricants and intercourse

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A comprehensive review by the World Health Organization reported that 8–22% of women have pain on intercourse (Latthe et al. *BMC Public Health* 2006;6:177–83). In addition, intercourse for the purpose of procreation can be quite stressful. Putting these facts together, it is no surprise that approximately one in four couples trying to conceive, use a lubricant (Ellington. *Fertil Steril* 2003;79 (Suppl 2):21–2).

Of course, it is likely that you will never know whether your patient is using a lubricant for intercourse unless you ask. The American Society for Reproductive Medicine's committee opinion on infertility specifically notes the potential impact of lubricant use on fertility (ASRM. *Fertil Steril* 2013;100:631–637). One lesson from this is the need for a complete history in our patients.

McNerney et al. report on the association of lubricant use with fertility. The authors' conclusions contradict the published literature.

Although there are important limitations, this study adds critical information suggesting that the overall use of lubricants, regardless of type, may not negatively affect the chances of becoming pregnant.

Before changing practice based on a study's findings, it is important to consider whether the patients studied look like those we see in our office. The women in the study were trying to become pregnant but were not infertile. As such, we cannot draw inferences about the impact of lubricants on women with infertility. Participants were not asked specifically about lubricant use during their fertile window. Only 76% of participants in this study conceived over 12 months, which is less than the 85–90% typically expected (Taylor. *Br Med J* 2003; 327:434–6). One could also wonder why the authors combined two databases containing slightly different populations with somewhat dissimilar protocols. Although this is typically done to

increase the statistical power of the study, this is not addressed.

As a major strength, the authors correctly point out that this is 'the largest study of lubricant use and fecundability to date and the first to evaluate whether type of lubricant affects fecundability'. Consequently, this *BJOG* article adds valuable information, especially as the findings run counter to much of our current teaching. Future studies will need to confirm the conclusions that lubricant use and type do not diminish the ability to conceive in women trying to become pregnant, as well as to expand this work to infertile couples. Importantly, as opposed to most published articles, these findings may directly influence how we counsel our patients – if you ask!

### Disclosure of interests

None declared. The completed disclosure of interest form is available to view online as supporting information. ■