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15 Vibrator Facts Everyone Needs to Know

By Ashley Mateo • Updated on December 19, 2022
Medically reviewed by Renita White, MD

More than 50% of people with vaginas use a vibrator, and nearly 45% of those with a penis have used a vibrator during sex. [1][2][3] But a lot of mystery surrounds these buzzy sex toys. Are vibrators only good for masturbation, or can they make coupled sex more satisfying? Who invented the Rabbit vibe, and why is it shaped like an animal? And is it true that relying on a vibrator too often can make your vagina permanently numb?

We took these and other pressing questions to the experts to compile the 15 most important and fascinating vibrator facts everyone needs to know.

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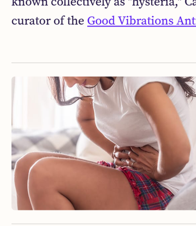
1. The First Vibrator Was Invented to Treat Depression and Anxiety

American physician George Taylor often gets credit for inventing the vibrator in 1869. Taylor's original device, a steam-powered vibrator, was designed to relieve symptoms of depression and anxiety in women, then known collectively as "hysteria," Carol Queen, PhD, a sexologist and curator of the Good Vibrations Antique Vibrator Museum, told *Health*.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"Hysteria was treated by vulval or clitoral massage and vibration," said Queen. Basically, people would lay on a table, and a vibrating ball under their pelvis helped them orgasm. At the time, this was considered a medical treatment and not masturbation that lead to sexual satisfaction. [4]

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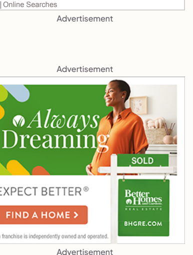

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2. Another Early Vibrator Was a Medical Device Intended for 'Male Muscles'

English physician Joseph Mortimer Granville invented the first electric handheld vibrator in the early 1880s. However, Granville did not design this device to treat "hysteria" symptoms and was very against using the device on people with vaginas. Instead, he advised doctors to use the device on "male skeletal muscles." [5]

Still, it's theorized that other healthcare providers used Granville's device on people with vaginas anyway. As more companies marketed vibrators as medical devices, more physicians could also purchase similar devices. By the turn of the century, vibrators were made available to consumers. In the early 1900s, you could even find them in the Sears, Roebuck & Co. catalog. [5]

3. The OG Modern Vibrator Was a Back Massager

Massagers-turned-vibrators is a historical theme. In 1968, the Hitachi Magic Wand hit store shelves and started a sex-positive vibrator revolution. However, Hitachi marketed the device as a "personal massager," not a vibrator. Still, feminist sex toy stores started selling it as a sex toy as early as 1974. [5] New York-based artist and sex educator Betty Dodson also upped its popularity after using the device in workshops where she taught people with vaginas how to masturbate. [6]

Hitachi never explicitly confirmed or denied that they made one of the most popular modern vibrators. But it was well known that people used the Magic Wand as a vibrator. Hitachi wasn't thrilled about that, so today it's sold without any company branding. [5]

4. The Rabbit Vibrator's Shape Helped Avoid Legal Issues

Vibratex invented the famous "Rabbit" vibrator in 1984, but the Japan-based company didn't opt for the rabbit shape just because it could simultaneously stimulate the clitoris. Japan's anti-obscenity law made it illegal to create penis-shaped objects. So, making the sex toy look like an innocent animal helped them get around the rule. It was first sold stateside in 1993 at Babeland in Seattle. [7]

5. Vibrators Aren't Just Penis Shapes That Vibrate

Today's vibrators come in all shapes and sizes that can vibrate, pulse, and suck. External vibrators range from small bullets to large personal massager wands, which can simulate areas like the clitoris, vulva, perineum, penis, or testicles. Some external vibrators designed for the clitoris also have a suction or licking action that helps mimic oral sex. Penis vibrators may also resemble vibrating rings or a sleeve. [8]

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6. Vibrators Can Also Stimulate Internal Erogenous Zones

Internal vibrators can be inserted vaginally or anally and often pulsate or vibrate. You'll also find these in various shapes, including cones for the anus or long curved shapes to help hit the vagina's G-spot. If you use an internal anal vibrator, make sure it has a flanged base so it doesn't accidentally get lost in your rectum.

Dual-stimulation vibrators also give you the best of both worlds but are usually geared toward people with vaginas. These are often rabbit shaped or C-shaped so they can simulate the inside of the vagina and the clitoris at the same time. [8]

7. Vibrators Offer Reliable Orgasms if You Have a Vagina

More than half of the population with vaginas uses a vibrator—but why? "They're reliable, and they never tire, as long as you have a charging cord or fresh batteries," Megan Stubbs, a sexologist, told *Health*.

Research also shows only 18% of people with vaginas orgasm from penetration alone, and 36.6% need clitoral stimulation to hit the Big O. [9] A vibrator conveniently offers the clitoral stimulation necessary for many to climax.

"[Vibrators] act as power tools for intense orgasms," Jenni Skyler, PhD, LMFT, a certified sex therapist, and sexologist, told *Health*. "Especially for busy, tired, stressed, or lower-libido women, a vibrator kicks arousal into gear way faster than most any other means."

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8. Vibrators Aren't Just for Masturbation

"Vibrators are a fun addition to erotic play," said Queen. "They can be a creative 'let's switch it up' rut-buster, or they can help women come when partner sex doesn't."

According to two 2009 *Journal of Sexual Medicine* studies, 80% of people with vaginas and 91% with penises also enjoyed partner play using vibrators. [2][1]

When sharing toys, you can also slip condoms over some vibrators for additional protection against sexually transmitted infections (STIs). [8]

9. Vibrators Don't Decrease Sensitivity or Cause Nerve Damage

Using a vibrator may make your vagina and vulva feel numb. However, vibrator-induced numbness is pretty rare—and it's not permanent. Research has shown about 16.5% of folks with a vagina reported temporary and mild numbness. [3] There is also no evidence that frequent vibrator damages vaginal nerve endings or causes the fictional "dead vagina syndrome." [10]

If you *do* experience any temporary numbness, you're probably just overstimulated. [3] Try adjusting the settings or changing the angle or position of your vibrator. You can also take a break and let your body reset.

10. Using a Vibrator Is Linked to Better Sexual Health

Outside of accidental tearing or irritation, there's really no danger in "overusing" a vibrator. In fact, people who regularly use vibrators tend to take care of their sexual health more and experience better sexual function.

A large national survey found vibrator users with vaginas were more likely to see an OB-GYN in the past year and self-exam their genitals during the previous month. [1] Studies also show vibrator use can help improve sexual desire, erections, and orgasms in people with penises. It can also help improve arousal, lubrication, and orgasm for those with a vagina. [3]

11. It Is Possible to Test a Vibrator in Public

Let's say you're shopping for a new vibrator in a store and you come across one you think you might like. How are you going to know if it offers the right kind of stimulation? There is a workaround that won't get you arrested.

"The best way to test a vibrator in public is to touch it to the tip of your nose," said Stubbs. "The high concentration of nerve endings will give you a good idea of how it will feel on your sensitive areas."

12. What Your Vibrator Is Made of Matters

Opt for silicone over other materials when choosing a vibrator. "It's easy to clean and not a permeable material," advised Queen. Permeable or porous materials (like jelly vibrators) can collect dirt and bacteria, which can then be transferred to the vagina and create an imbalance or even an infection. [8]

Studies have also found that some unregulated jelly rubber vibrators contain phthalates, chemicals that may cause cancer. [3] Additionally, if you want longevity, rubber toys can break down when they come into contact with latex condoms. [8]

13. You Need to Clean Your Vibrator Regularly

No matter the material of your vibrator, make sure you clean it after each use. Cleaning your vibrator can help prevent potential infections or passing STIs if you share toys with a partner.

Use soap and water or antibacterial sprays. Depending on the model, some silicone vibrators can even go in the dishwasher, but always check what the manufacturer suggests. [8]

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14. The Wrong Lube Can Ruin Your Vibrator

Using a personal lubricant with a vibrator can make the experience even more slippery and enjoyable. It also reduces your risk of tearing and irritation. However, make sure you only use water-based lube with silicone sex toys. [3]

Silicone- and oil-based lubes can both break down the surface of your silicone vibrator, resulting in tears and cracks in the toy's surface that can harbor bacteria. Silicone pre-lubricated condoms can also break down silicone vibrators if you're covering toys during partnered sex. So not only will you ruin your favorite vibrator with the wrong lube, but you may also increase your risk of infection. [3]

15. It's Really Hard to Recycle a Vibrator

Is your vibe broken or past its prime? Unfortunately, no matter what it's made of, you'll probably have to trash it. Most vibrator materials are recyclable, but there isn't a reliable way to recycle sex toys.

"Most municipalities in North America will not recycle vibrators because they are considered a biohazard," said Skyler. "And for most sex stores, it tends to cost more to recycle old toys than just dump it and make a new one." So, throwing your dead vibrator into the recycling bin may cause the entire bin to be flagged for contamination and thrown out. Your best bet is to look for a manufacturer sex toy recycling program. And if it doesn't exist, throw your vibe in the trash.

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