



**ELLE**

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# WOMAN

**Margo Kane**

First Nations storyteller  
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One year later

Pat Manson's family finds  
strength greater than  
their sadness

The **buzz** about  
**sex toys**

# The buzz about sex toys

Everything you need to know about sex toys but may be too embarrassed to ask.

I was first introduced to a vibrator by a close friend. No, let me rephrase that. I was first introduced to the buzzing sound of a vibrator by a close friend. You see, our living quarters were quite cramped and privacy was basically non-existent whenever anyone else was at home.

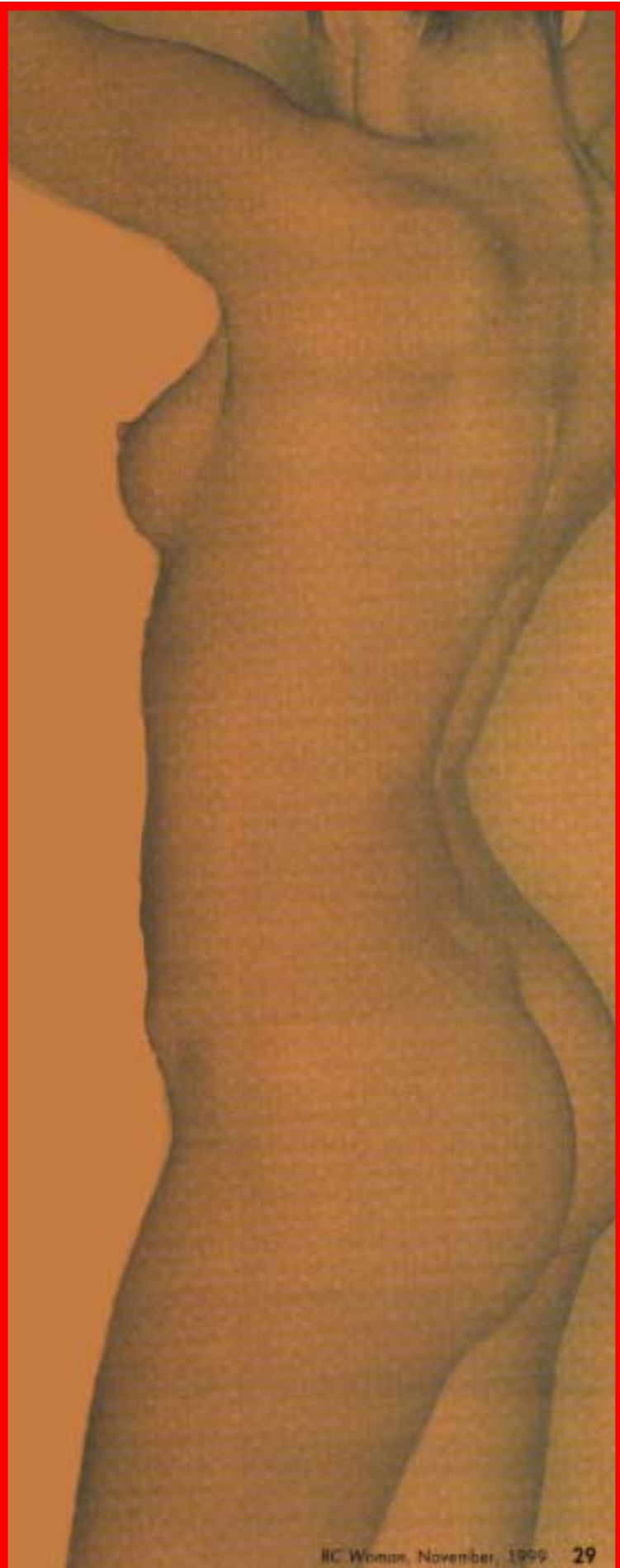
Lack of privacy or not, my friend Donna was completely comfortable with her own sexuality and talked as casually and as frequently about her vibrator as she did about her shoes. Young and impressionable, I listened intently while she explained that it was her boyfriend's idea; how at first she was very embarrassed when he bought it; how they left it untouched on the night stand for the first two weeks; how she turned it on and watched it dance on the table while she was alone; and now, how she didn't think she could live without it.

"When my boyfriend first mentioned it, I was insulted," Donna remembers. "I thought he was telling me I wasn't very good or something. Then, I realized this was something for me, not him.

"Long after he split, I still had the vibrator," Donna says more than 15 years later, a guilt-ridden smile spreading across her face.

Unlike Donna, it took me a few years to get comfortable enough with all this information, before buying a vibrator, under the guise of good humour with a group of friends at a sex-toy home party.

Let's just say I've been smiling ever since. ▷



## It's all in the head

So, have you ever used a vibrator? It's not exactly the easiest question to ask someone. Believe me, I tried it in preparation for this article. Firstly, sexual pleasure is a personal subject and even under the premise of research, it's difficult to get some women to open up. Others still think that using a sex toy makes you a pervert — never mind what that makes someone who asks if you use one.

"Women are often still affected by negative messages around sex in society," says Dr. Bianca Rucker, a Vancouver marital therapist who specializes in sexual issues. "Statements like 'nice girls don't like sex' contributes further to our inhibitions. Worse yet, some families never talk about the positive nature of sex."

Masturbation may make it possible to overcome some barriers or hang ups and contrary to the myths you won't go blind. "Self stimulation is a healthy positive way to discover your own body," explains Dr. Rucker. "After she discovers what turns her on, a woman can then share that with her partner, improving their sexual relationship."

Karen's story is similar. She explains she bought a vibrator at her sister's urging after the subject came up one day while complaining about her boring sex life.

"Before buying a vibrator I was the queen of faking it," says Karen. "I never knew what it felt like to climax. Sex was always a bigger thrill for my husband than myself. But using a vibrator and dildo made it possible for me to explore what I liked and become comfortable with my own sexuality. The sex we have together has never been better. But I have to admit, I like to play by myself as well."

## The right ambiance

Now that you've decided you're ready to make a purchase or get more information, choosing the right store could be the key to having a positive experience. Today's sexuality boutiques cater to the female market, taking out the smut and sleaze and

Physician-induced orgasm was used in the late 18th century to treat women who suffered from hysteria (thought to be a nervous condition resulting from sexual deprivation). A doctor invented a steam-powered massager to quicken the process — giving birth to the first vibrator.

focusing on sexual pleasure with high-quality products.

"This is an environment safe for women to shop in," says Womyns'Ware co-owner Otter Louis. "Our products are predominately designed and made by women. We have no visible packaging. There's no porn or dirty magazines. It's a comfortable atmosphere where you're approached by a professional and asked if you need assistance."

Porn-shop staples like novelty items and gag gifts are non-existent. "We've created an environment for the empowerment and celebration of women's sexuality."

Louis says women are encouraged to make informed decisions. The all-female staff will explain the product's purpose and help the customer to understand the benefits involved with each toy.

If you're serious about buying a sex toy, Louis recommends shopping on your own, with your sexual partner or with a true confidante.

"What doesn't work is a big group of friends that all come in together. Sure, they have a lot of fun and there's a lot of giggling but then usually one of the women buys something and the rest do the same because they don't want to look foolish or everyone's too embarrassed to ask any questions and they just leave ruining the experience for the other customers."

"Often when this happens, the women return a few days later by themselves."

## Toy story

Overcoming your fears and inhibitions is worth the battle. There are more than 80 different styles of dildos and more than 50 kinds of vibrators available. And don't overlook the rainbow of colours in most styles.

"For every customer who walks through the door, the reaction is different. One woman will say, 'I'm looking for something natural in flesh tone' and then the next will say, 'I like the shape. Does it come in purple to match my sheets?'"

Now, with all those options, where do you begin?

"The first thing we do with a customer is establish what they are looking for — clitoral stimulation or penetrative stimulation. If you're interested in clitoral stimulation, are you thinking of with a partner or on your own?"

With a partner, Otter recommends either the Mini Pearl, Lovely Ball or Honey Dog. Varying in price from \$24 to \$39, all three are egg-style vibrators with a cord that leads to a hand-held control pad.

"These are wonderful for couple play. While your partner moves it around, you can adjust the intensity if you want it stronger."

Apollo, white shaft with a red top, is similar to the egg-style vibrators without the cord and costs \$30.

If you're on your own, anything will work. The Hitachi Magic Wand is a classic for \$90. A plug-in vibrator, it's built with the same quality as a small appliance. "But has the weight of a hand-held blender," adds Otter laughingly.

Otter says the Erosillator is the *crème de la crème* in the vibe market. "It's the only plug-in vibrator that's designed as a sexual product. Swiss engineered it's the only sex product endorsed by Dr. Sue Westheimer. It doesn't vibrate; it oscillates which many women find to be more stimulating than typical vibrators. With four interchangeable heads with different shapes for a variety of possible sensations, it's lightweight, extremely quiet and costs \$200."

If intense vibration isn't an issue, vibes that run on batteries offer more mobility and a smaller physical size.

Originally designed and marketed as personal massagers, vibrators work by stimulating the bundle of nerve endings clustered in the clitoris. The right tool for the job is key here. Yes, they all vibrate, so does the washer during spin cycle, says Otter, who recommends sex-toy virgins choose a vibrator that's battery operated and has a variable speed for starters.

Dildos are ideal if you're looking for penetrative stimulation and Otter is adamant that silicone is the only way to go. "Silicone is safer and has a longer life. There's no risk of it leaking toxins like with rubber or soft vinyl products and it's not absorbent, so it eliminates the threat of recurring bladder and yeast infections. As well it doesn't feel cold or foreign."

Harder or softer, smooth or bumpy, dildos vary in length, thickness, texture and density and contrary to popular belief, bigger

### Batteries included and other important details

The shopping experience needs to be positive and informative to be pleasurable. "A woman needs to take home the right product or she's going to think that either sex toys are horrible or she's dysfunctional."

Staff should advise of proper use, care and cleaning for your dill or vibe. If they don't, ask!

One important thing to keep in mind: Otter says electronics are electronics no matter their shape or purpose and it's best to always buy quality. "Just like cameras and walkmans, you're far better off with a Japanese or German product."

With proper care, your joy toy should provide you with years of satisfaction. Vibrators should be treated like any other good electronic device: never immerse in water when cleaning, don't sleep on them and don't yank on those cords.

Silicone dildos are best cleaned with antibacterial soap and water.

## "We've created an environment for the empowerment and celebration of women's sexuality."

isn't necessarily better. "Unless you like hammering on your cervix, stick to six inches or under."

Dills range in price from \$30 to \$120 and come with names like Willie, Mistress, Chamlette, Cupid, Jonah, Rex 2, Rascal and many others.

Clit Lane is a dill with clitoral stimulator built in. The density, head, texture and curve of the shaft make for incredible vaginal stimulation. Womyns'Ware Inc. co-owners Otter Louis and Janna Sylvest had input into the design of this Vancouver product and the result is a first in the silicone industry. It costs \$115.

G-Force, as the name indicates, is designed for G-spot stimulation and keeps its promise. Cost is \$100.

Not all dildos look like a penis. "We have tons of products that don't resemble male anatomy. Women design toys based on how they feel in the vagina as opposed to how it looks."

Latex, vinyl or novelty toys present their own set of problems. Because they're highly porous, they retain smell and bacteria. On that same note, when cleaned they retain the cleaning solution and could lead to further complications. Some women use condoms with their dildos to ensure they are always clean and fresh and this is a perfect example of why.

A warning: Whatever your pleasure, it's important to shop in an environment where you feel comfortable. The internet offers many opportunities for anonymous browsing and buying.

As well, sex toys aren't for everyone; but for those that want to give their erotic lives a jolt, there's no safer practice.

*Womyns'Ware is located at 896 Commercial Drive in Vancouver. Call (604) 254-2543 or toll free 1-888-WYM-WARE. Check out their website at [www.womynsware.com](http://www.womynsware.com) for more information.*

## Women, did you know?

...Anise imitates the female hormone estrogen, increasing sexual intensity and satisfaction

...Fenugreek, once fed to women in harems to augment breast size, is now used to elevate sex drive

...The Chinese herb epimedium has a testosterone-like substance known to enhance a woman's sexual drive

...The Mexican plant damiana is a sexual rejuvenator, aiding vitality by providing oxygen to the genital area

— Excerpted from book, *Sex Herbs*, by Beth Ann Petro Roybal and Gayle Skowronski. Distributed by Raincoast Books.