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play with
sex toys



Yup, we said it: sex toys.

In fact, women all over the place are plugging in to give their erotic lives a jolt. Buffy Childerhose explains what the buzz is all about

Toys in babeland

When the power died in Helen C.'s Montreal apartment during the ice storm of 1998, it wasn't the frigid winds of a Quebec winter that made her blood run cold. No, the thought that sent shivers down her spine was this: her vibrator was a plug-in.

No longer the preserve of sleazy boutiques, sex toys have finally gone mainstream. From coyly named "personal massagers" to the explicitly dubbed Clit Lane, our toys have come a long way, baby. And so have we. Before buying a vibrator, Helen rarely climaxed, with or without a partner. "My orgasms were very timid, I didn't understand what the fuss was about." After hearing a friend wax poetic about a vibrator, she finally took matters into her own hands. "I felt like I'd learned a new language instantly," Helen says, recalling her orgasm. "I finally understood what everyone was talking about." While Helen spent a few months figuring out the world of

sex toys, you can get yourself primed over the next few pages.

You'll go blind, and other myths

Even today, some women think sex toys are only for perverts, which is like saying that pleasure is only for perverts. Guilt about sexual pleasure lies at the root of many women's misconceptions about "jilling off" (see *Toy stories*, page 97, for more euphemisms for the m-word). After you dismiss the ridiculous (*I'll go straight to hell*) and the medically impossible (*I'll go blind*), there are still a few untruths that linger.

- *The vibrator will electrocute me and I'll die a humiliating death.* Most battery-operated toys are no more dangerous than your Walkman. It's possible to electrocute yourself if you bathe with your plug-in, but the same is true of a hair dryer. So, unless you're the type who thinks it's wise to use the electric shaver in the tub, it's unlikely that your buzzing distractions will power you into the great beyond.

- *I'll become addicted to my toys and won't*

be able to climax with my partner. Sexperts argue that using sex toys can actually improve the quality of a woman's shared sex life. The theory is that masturbation, via sex toys or by hand, opens up new erotic vistas for women who haven't had orgasms or who are too self-conscious to climax with a partner. In short, the more sexual you are, the more sexual you become.

Top tools

A world of pleasure awaits once you ditch your fears about sex toys. And it doesn't matter if you consider yourself an old-fashioned girl or a modern woman, today's tools run the gamut from ancient Ben-Wa balls to high-tech, computer-controlled vibrators.

One of the most popular toys is the Hitachi Magic Wand. With a cylinder-shaped body topped by a vibrating ball, this plug-in device is available practically everywhere, innocuously marketed as a personal massager. So, when Granny finds it in the hide-a-bed, you can mumble something about sore muscles. To its credit, the Wand does work wonders on sore shoulders. Most women, however, aim it farther south. Hot tip: battery-operated versions of the Wand – such as the Apollo – can go anywhere with you. Magic Wand, \$70 to \$100; Apollo, \$25 to \$35.

Also lumped under the sly heading of personal massager is the coil vibrator. Remember those hairbrush-size massagers with the changeable heads? If only you'd known the merits of the nub attachment! Like the Magic Wand, a coil vibrator is a multipurpose instrument that can handle anything from nagging aches to, well, nagging aches. This tool also has a variety of speeds for all needs. Unlike the Magic Wand, a coil vibrator produces a faster – rather than deeper – vibration. Not for everyone, but revered by its advocates. From \$30 to \$80.

Another favourite is the "Look, Ma, no hands" toy. The current standard is Tickling Panties, undies with a front pocket that holds a vibrating egg over your girlie bits (the egg is either wired to a control or mastered by a cordless remote). A warning: one size fits some, not all. If you do find your size, or make some modifications, you can >

tickle your fancy and free your hands for other things. From \$40 to \$140.

The Pocket Rocket is another battery-powered pleaser. As the name suggests, the rocket's a small but powerful toy. A plastic cylinder with several vibrating nubs on its flat top, this tiny trooper delivers plenty of bang for the buck (about \$30). Perfect for those who think "buffin' the muffin" should be a free-range activity.

If you've ever wondered about those weird-looking vibes shaped like animals, you're not alone. Apparently, Japan has a law against the export of goods depicting human genitalia, hence the Japanese sexual menagerie known as a dual vibrator. This toy has a vibrator shaft filled with beads that rotate and caress the vaginal walls and has appendages shaped like dolphins or beavers at the base for clitoral stimulation. Each element has its own control, so you can mix and match the speed and intensity of each motion (hence the "dual" label). A good bet for women who enjoy vaginal and clitoral stimulation equally. From \$60 to \$150.

For dames favouring penetration, a dildo is the ultimate joy toy. They come in a variety of shapes (not everyone likes a penis-shaped toy), sizes (from tiny to titanic) and materials (typically latex, plastic or rubber). While these materials are inexpensive, all have major failings: some women are allergic to latex, and all three are porous substances that absorb both colour and odour. Enter

the new kid – silicone. Unlike its rivals, silicone is hypoallergenic and nonporous. It can be easily cleaned and conducts both heat and vibration. From \$30 to \$160, with silicone dills at the top of the scale.

No more plain brown wrappers

Back in the days of disco, the only places to get sex toys were dingy stores run by men who were eager to *be* your toy, not just sell you one. Today's sex shops are more user-friendly, and mail order and the Web allow for discreet home shopping. The luxury of anonymous buying has tempted so many women that babes in toyland are now a marketing target. Another trend is women's boutiques. With their roots in home sex-toy parties of the '70s, female-oriented sex stores are taking "petting the bunny" into the 21st century.

There are a handful of women's sexuality stores that have Canada buzzing. Halifax is home to Venus Envy, Toronto boasts both Good For Her and Come as You Are and Vancouver is the site of Womyns' Ware (home of the aforementioned Clit Lane). What distinguishes these stores from their sleazy predecessors is the lack of novelty items. Eschewing porn-shop staples such as penis-shaped pasta and other gag gifts, these stores offer high-quality products and much more.

"Our mandate is much broader than retail," explains Womyns' Ware co-owner Janna Sylvest. "It's about



recognizing women's sexuality as something sacred and powerful." Consider these facts: more than two dozen of the toys sold by Womyns' Ware are designed by Sylvest and co-owner Otter Louis and manufactured by local artists; the Web site for Come as You Are provides info about disability and sexuality.

The women who staff these stores agree on one thing when it comes to sexessories – there's no one-size-fits-all ideal toy. "It's not about what's perfect," says Venus Envy's Shelley Taylor. "It's about knowing what's right for you." Carlyle Jansen of Good For Her agrees, adding that a woman should figure out what she wants, such as vaginal or clitoral stimulation. "Make sure your eyes are not bigger than your vagina," adds Jansen. She advises experimenting ▷

Toy stories

When women in the late 18th century suffered from "hysteria" (then described as a nervous condition resulting from sexual deprivation), doctors treated patients with "paroxysm"—physician-

induced orgasm. The first vibrator was born when a doctor invented a steam-powered massager to expedite the process. It wasn't long before the massagers were being marketed in magazines of the day, and happy patients opted for home treatment.

A good rule of thumb: anything inserted into the vagina should come

with the means to remove it. Those jingly silver Ben-Wa balls from the Asian corner store don't pop out that easily. They also set off airport metal detectors so don't forget where they are. Speaking of airports, remember that a gal who travels with her toys must be prepared to have them exposed to the world. There's nothing quite

so embarrassing as a customs official hauling out your dildo before a huge lineup. Buffin' the muffin, jilling off, petting the bunny. The euphemisms for women's masturbation are gentler than those used for men's solo activities. But one of the best descriptions comes from comic Lea DeLaria: "I just call it the end of the day!"

with your fingers or a cucumber, peeled or fitted with a condom, to find out the best size for you.

- Venus Envy 902/422-0004; www.dbis.ns.ca/~venus/
- Good For Her 416/588-0900; www.goodforher.com
- Come as You Are 416/504-7934; www.comeasyouare.com
- Womyns' Ware 604/254-2543; www.womynsware.com

Fact and friction

Let's say you finally worked up the nerve to buy a joy toy. Before stampeding to the bedroom, consider this: if you use a lubricant with a lover, you'll probably need one with your toys. There are lots of good lubes on the market, including Probe and Astroglide. If you're using a silicone toy, stay clear of silicone-based lubricants such as Wet Platinum, which will leave a gummy residue. A 70-millilitre bottle costs about \$10.

Just as you'd expect a lover to be clean, demand the same of your toy. That said, don't forget that vibes are appliances - immersing yours in a soapy tub will trash it. As many vibrators are designed for clitoral use - not vaginal - they usually just need a quick wash with antibacterial soap and water. The rules vary for dildos. While silicone can be cleaned with soap and water, boiled or even washed in the dishwasher, latex and rubber toys are porous and present more of a challenge. "It's like dollar-store plastic containers," cautions Sylvest. "If you put spaghetti sauce in one of those, you never get the colour or smell out."

Some women use condoms with their dildos to keep them clean and fresh. Another option is ForPlay's adult toy cleaner, which contains the spermicide non-oxynol 9 (N-9). A word of warning to chemically sensitive women: N-9 can lend whole new meaning to the phrase "burning bush." To avoid adverse reactions after you wash a toy with this product, scrub it with soap and water to remove any traces of the spermicide. Or try Hibitane, an antibacterial

solution available at drugstores.

When it comes to caring for your toys, use common sense. Don't drop your vibrator or yank on its cords. Running your vibrator for more than 20 minutes can fry its electronics and make it hot enough to damage delicate tissue. When using silicone or jelly toys, be careful not to puncture the surface for the tears will spread. Also, remove batteries from any toy you won't be using for a while. The two most important rules of play: read the instructions and ask boutique staff.

Toys for two

Now that your new electric friend is putting roses in your cheeks, it's possible that your flesh-and-blood partner may be looking wan. When Penny W. brought a toy home, her boy was a little hurt. "He took it as a comment on the quality of his love-making." To dispel his fears, Penny gently explained her motives, none of which impugned his talents. "I told him how it felt, why I liked it, even where I kept it so he could check it out, unchaperoned." Eventually, his jealousy vanished. And when the toy first joined their love-making, it was at his suggestion, something that has more than a few rewards. "Now he gets to watch my face as I orgasm," Penny explains. "This is an exciting thing for him."

To ease a reluctant partner into sex toys, try a product built for two, such as the Diving Dolphin. It's a rubber ring, equipped with two vibrating eggs, that slips around a man's penis and stimulates her clitoris and vagina and his penis. You could also let him "man" the controls or even play with the toy on his own. Soon your partner will realize that toys are like lingerie or massage oils - they can also enhance your shared sex life. **C**

Share your toy tales. Click on the Talk icon of the Chatelaine Connects Web site at www.chatelaine.com and then choose Passions.