

Vibrator (sex toy)

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A **vibrator** is a sex toy that is used on the body to produce pleasurable erotic stimulation. Most 2010-era vibrators contain an electric-powered device which pulsates or throbs, which is used to stimulate erogenous zones such as the clitoris, rest of the vulva or vagina, penis, scrotum or anus. There are many different shapes and models of vibrators. Some vibrators designed for women stimulate both the clitoris and the vagina. Some vibrators designed for couples stimulate the genitals of both partners.



Two vibrators in a sex shop

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History

Early development

The electric vibrator was invented in the late 19th century as a medical instrument for pain relief and the treatment of various ailments, one account gives its first use at the Salpêtrière hospital in Paris in 1878, with Romain Vigouroux cited as the inventor. English physician and inventor Joseph Mortimer Granville, who also developed an early model, asserted his own priority in the invention and has been described as the 'father of the modern electromechanical vibrator'.^[1] Mortimer Granville's 1883 book *Nerve-vibration and excitation as agents in the treatment of functional disorder and organic disease* describes the intended use of his vibrator for purposes including pain relief, the treatment of neuralgia, neurasthenia, morbid irritability, indigestion and constipation.^[2] These early vibrators became popular

among the medical profession and were used for treating a wide variety of ailments in women and men including hysteria, arthritis, constipation, amenorrhea, inflammations, and tumors; some wounded World War I soldiers received vibrotherapy as treatment at English and French hospitals in Serbia.^[3]

Vibrators began to be marketed for home use in magazines from around 1900 together with other electrical household goods, for their supposed health and beauty benefits. An early example was the 'Vibratile,' an advert for which appeared in McClure's magazine in March 1899, offered as a cure for 'Neuralgia, Headache, Wrinkles'. These advertisements disappeared in the 1920s, possibly because their appearance in pornography, and growing understanding of female sexual function, made it no longer tenable for mainstream society to avoid the sexual connotations of the devices.^[4]

Academic debate over possible early use for female sexual stimulation

Historian of technology Rachel Maines, in her book *The Technology of Orgasm*,^[5] has argued that the development of the vibrator in the late 19th century was in large part due to the requirements of doctors for an easier way to perform genital massage on women, often to 'hysterical paroxysm' (orgasm), which was historically a treatment for the once common medical diagnosis of female hysteria. Maines writes that this treatment had been recommended since classical antiquity in Europe, including in the Hippocratic corpus and by Galen, and continued to be used into the medieval and modern periods,^[6] but was not seen as sexual by physicians due to the absence of penetration,^[7] and was viewed by them as a difficult and tedious task.^[8] Maines writes that the first use of the vibrator at the Salpêtrière was on hysterical women, but notes that Joseph Mortimer Granville denied that he had, or ever would, use his invention for this purpose;^[3] additionally, Maines states that the true use of these medical vibrators, and the vibrators marketed for home use in the early 20th century, was not openly stated, but proceeded under 'social camouflage'.^[9] One example of suggestive advertising given is a 1908 advert in *National Home Journal* for the Bebout hand-powered mechanical vibrator, containing the text "Gentle, soothing, invigorating and refreshing. Invented by a woman who knows a woman's needs."^[10]

Other historians disagree with Maines about the historical prevalence of genital massage as a treatment for female hysteria, and over the extent to which early vibrating massagers were used for this purpose. The idea that stimulation to orgasm was a standard treatment for female hysteria in ancient and medieval Europe has been disputed on the grounds of being a distortion of the sources,^[11] and cases of this treatment in the 19th and early 20th centuries, and of the use of early vibrators to perform it, have been described as a practice that if it occurred at all, would have been confined to an extremely limited group.^[12] Maines has said her widely reported theory should be treated as a hypothesis rather than a fact.^[13]

1960s onwards



1913 advertisement

The vibrator re-emerged due to the sexual revolution of the 1960s. On June 30, 1966, Jon H. Tavel applied for a patent for the "Cordless Electric Vibrator for Use on the Human Body",^[14] ushering in the modern personal vibrator. The patent application referenced an earlier patent dating back to 1938, for a flashlight with a shape that left little doubt as to a possible alternate use. The cordless vibrator was patented on March 28, 1968, and was soon followed by such improvements as multi-speed and one-piece construction, which made it cheaper to manufacture and easier to clean.

In the 1980s and 1990s vibrators became increasingly visible in mainstream public culture, especially after a landmark August 1998 episode of the HBO show *Sex and the City*, in which the character Charlotte becomes addicted to a rabbit vibrator. Appearing in a regular segment on the popular US television series *The Oprah Winfrey Show* in March 2009,^[15] Dr. Laura Berman recommended that mothers teach their 15- or 16-year-old daughters the concept of pleasure by getting them a clitoral vibrator. Today, CVS, Walgreens, Kroger, Safeway, Target and Walmart are among major national US chain retailers that include vibrators on store shelves.^[16]

As of 2013, rechargeable vibrators were beginning to be manufactured to reduce the environmental impact of battery-operated vibrators.^[17]

Adoption

Research published in a 2009 issue of *The Journal of Sexual Medicine* demonstrates that about 53% of women in the United States ages 18 to 60 have used a vibrator.^[18] A 2010 study in the *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy* found that 43.8% of heterosexual males in the United States had used vibrators. 94% of these men had done so as part of foreplay with their partner, and 82% had done so as part of sexual intercourse.^[19] Among non-heterosexual men, 49.8% have used vibrators.^[20]

Vibrators and orgasm

Vibrators may be recommended by sex therapists to women who have difficulty reaching orgasm through masturbation and/or intercourse.^[21]

Couples may also choose to use a vibrator to enhance the pleasure of one or both partners. There is a device available that functions as a small vibrator specifically meant for couples to use during intercourse.^[22]



A woman using a vibrator

Types of erotic vibrators

Some vibrators are marketed as "body massagers"—although they still may be used, like the ones sold as adult sex toys, for autoeroticism. Some vibrators run on batteries while others have a power cord that plugs into a wall socket. There is also a vibrator that uses the flow of air from a vacuum cleaner to stimulate the clitoris. Modern versions of old musical vibrators synchronize the vibrations to music from

a music player or a cell phone. Some luxury brand vibrators are also completely covered in medical grade silicone with no exposed control panels or seams. Although proper cleaning is required for any sex toy, having fewer places for bacteria to grow reduces the chance of infection.

While some companies sell significantly larger dildos and vibrators, most that are marketed for vaginal or anal insertion are sized around the average penis size.^[23]

There is a wide range of vibrators but most of them fall into several broad categories:

- **Clitoral:** Often sold as "back massagers", these are powerful vibrators such as the Hitachi Magic Wand.^{[24][25]} The clitoral vibrator is a sex toy used to provide sexual pleasure and to enhance orgasm by stimulating the clitoris. Although most of the vibrators available can be used as clitoral vibrators, they may have special designs and models that would not resemble a vibrator. They commonly come in small sizes and in a variety of colors, textures and shapes. There is also a dual type of vibrator which provides stimulation to both clitoris and G-spot. They are normally driven by batteries and some of them are specially designed for underwater use. The most common type of clitoral vibrator is small, egg-shaped and attached to a multi-speed battery pack by a long cord. Variations include vibrators shaped like narrow bullets, animals, ergonomic forms, miniature rockets and large human tongues. Regardless of the design, the main function of the clitoral vibrator is to vibrate at varying speeds and intensities. Some of the clitoral vibrators may be inserted into the vagina. These typically have a small arm near the base of the vibrator, providing clitoral and vaginal stimulation simultaneously.
- **Dildo-shaped:** Approximately penis-shaped, can be made of plastic, silicone, rubber, vinyl, or latex. Vibrating dildos are designed for both individual usage and with a partner. They may be used for vaginal and anal penetration, as well as for oral penetration. They come in different sizes, colors and textures, and they may be double-ended, so that both anal and vaginal stimulation is achieved at the same time.
- **Egg or bullet vibrators:** an egg- or bullet-shaped vibrating item for vagina insertion with wired or wireless control.
- **Waterproof:** Can be used wet, such as in the shower. Although marketed as waterproof, most should not be submerged. The ones designed for underwater usage may be used in the swimming pool, bath or shower, or any other wet place. The



Vibrator for Couples:
Love Ring



Hitachi Magic Wand



Techno Rabbit Vibrator

waterproof vibrators are recommended to be used with a water compatible lubricant, such as silicone-based lubricant.

- Rabbit, Two-pronged for stimulation of both the vagina and the clitoris simultaneously. It was featured on *Sex and the City* in the late 90s.^[26] The rabbit vibrator actually consists of two vibrators of different sizes. A phallus-like shaped vibrator is intended to be inserted into the vagina to stimulate the vagina, while a smaller clitoral stimulator is placed facing forward onto the main vibrator. The rabbit vibrator was named after the shape of the clitoral stimulator, which resembles a pair of rabbit ears. They are normally made of rubber, jelly, silicone, or latex and they come in a wide variety of colors, sizes and designs.
- G-spot: Similar to the traditional vibrator but with a curve and often a soft jelly-like coating. The curve is designed to stimulate the g-spot or prostate. This type of vibrator is made of materials such as silicone or acrylic. It can be used with or without the vibrations. They are recommended to be used with a significant amount of lubricant, especially when used anally.
- Programmable and remote-control: A vibrator worn in or against the genitals that can be pre-programmed or controlled remotely. An example is "Little Rooster" which utilizes a timer and is intended to wake the user by vibrating at first gently and then with increasing power.^[27] Other vibrators come with a handheld remote, available in both wired and cordless, that can be used to adjust speed and intensity.
- Pocket rocket: Shaped like a cylinder, one of its ends has some vibrating bulges. It is meant to stimulate the clitoris or nipples, not for vaginal insertion. A pocket rocket is a mini-vibrator that is typically about five inches long and which resembles a small, travel-sized flashlight. The Pocket Rocket vibrator is a discreet sex toy that may be carried around in one's purse or briefcase. It is specially designed to provide clitoral stimulation and although it is said to be discreet is not one of the most silent vibrators. Many users claim that it is quite noisy. Due to its small dimension, it is powered by a single battery. It usually has only one speed.
- "Undercover" vibrators: Vibrators discreetly shaped as everyday objects, such as lipstick tubes, cell phones, or art pieces. Occasionally some women use actual mobile phones in this function. This type of vibrators is made of a wide range of materials, shapes and colors. The undercover vibrators are usually relatively small enough and most of the time they have only one speed and are powered by a single battery. They tend to copy an exact shape and design of the object they are intended to be mistaken as.



G-Spot Vibrator



Designer vibrators



Remote control Vibrator

- **Anal vibrators:** Vibrators designed for anal use have either a flared base or a long handle to grip, to prevent them from slipping inside and becoming lodged in the rectum. Anal vibrators come in different shapes but they are commonly butt plugs or phallus-like vibrators. They are recommended to be used with a significant amount of lubricant and to be inserted gently and carefully to prevent any potential damage to the rectal lining.
- **"Butterfly":** Vibrator strapped around legs and waist for hands-free clitoral stimulation during sexual intercourse. The butterfly vibrator was named after its shape. It comes in three variations: traditional, remote control, and with anal and/or vaginal stimulators. They are made of silicone, plastic and latex, or jelly.
- **Vibrating cockring:** Vibrator (usually cordless) inserted in or attached to a cock ring, usually for stimulation of the clitoris. This is actually a part of a "cock ring" which is attached to the penis to enhance clitoral stimulation during sexual intercourse.
- **Dual area vibrators:** These vibrators are designed to stimulate two erogenous zones simultaneously or independently. They are usually found in the form of a clitoral stimulator and vaginal stimulator; an example is the Sybian. For men, there are vibrators which stimulate the prostate and perineum at the same time.
- **Triple area vibrators:** These vibrators are designed to stimulate three erogenous zones simultaneously or independently. These provide stimulation to the vagina, clitoris and anal regions, in women. The designs for men stimulate the anus, perineum and scrotum.
- **Multispeed Vibrators:** Multispeed vibrators allow users to customize how fast the vibrator's pulsing or massaging movements occur. Depending on the specific type of vibrator, the speed change is made by simply pushing a button a certain number of times, allowing users to change speeds several times throughout the usage.
- **Smart vibrators:** These vibrators use Bluetooth connections to allow for remote control over the internet, vibration in-sync with multimedia content, programmable vibrations, and similar via mobile applications. The first smart vibrator was the Vibase, which was a crowdfunded project.^{[28][29]}



A 'pocket rocket' type vibrator

Vibrators for disabled people

Disabled people can find that vibrators are an essential part of their sex life for two reasons: First, it might be the only way to get sexual satisfaction due to impaired arm and hand function.^[30] Second, for some disabled men, the use of a vibrator is their only way to provide a semen sample for in-vitro fertilization.^[30]

Legal and ethical issues

The possession and sale of vibrators is illegal in some jurisdictions, including India, although they are sold online.^[31]

Until recently, many American Southern and some Great Plains states banned the sale of vibrators completely, either directly or through laws regulating "obscene devices".^[32] On Valentine's Day, 2007, a federal appeals court upheld Alabama's law prohibiting the sale of sex toys.^[33] The law, the Anti-Obscenity Enforcement Act of 1998, was also upheld by the Alabama Supreme Court on September 11, 2009.^[34]

In February 2008, a US federal appeals court overturned a Texas statute banning the sales of vibrators and other sexual toys, deeming such a statute as violating the right to privacy guaranteed by the 14th amendment to the U.S. Constitution.^[35] The appeals court cited *Lawrence v. Texas*, where the U.S. Supreme Court in 2003 struck down bans on consensual sex between gay couples, as unconstitutionally aiming at "enforcing a public moral code by restricting private intimate conduct". Similar statutes have been struck down in Colorado and Kansas. As of 2009, Alabama is the only state where a law prohibiting the sale of sex toys remains on the books, though Alabama residents are permitted to buy sex toys with a doctor's note.^{[34][36]}

An American bioethicist and medical historian, Jacob M. Appel has argued that sex toys are a "social good" and that the devices, which he refers to as "marital substitutes", play "an important role in the emotional lives of millions of Americans".^[34] Appel has written:

I cannot say whether more Alabama women own vibrators than own Bibles. If I were guessing, I would suspect that a majority derive more use out of the vibrators. Certainly more pleasure. Nor does there appear to be any remotely rational basis for keeping sex toys out of the hands of married adults, or single adults, or even children. Now that we are relatively confident that masturbation does not make little girls go blind, or cause palms to sprout hair, exposure to sex toys shouldn't harm them. On the list of items that I might not want children to be exposed to in stores—guns, matches, poisons, junk food—sex toys are way down the list.^[34]

In popular culture

The historical fiction film *Hysteria* features a reworked history of the vibrator focusing on Joseph Mortimer Granville's invention, and the treatment of female hysteria through the medical administration of orgasm.^[37] Its historical accuracy has been criticised on the grounds that Granville's vibrator was for male pain relief.^[38]

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