Hey Alice,

What is "lube?" I've heard a lot of "lubes" in your advice and answers to others, but I'm still unsure of what it really is. Is it some sort of lubrication?

Curious

Dear Curious,

You're right. "Lube" is a shorter, more casual way of saying "lubricant" or "lubrication." In general, lubricants help machines of all kinds, from bicycles to jet engines, run more smoothly. For the purposes of this question, lube gives the human machine greater glide during sex, making sex more comfortable and pleasurable. Lubes come in three basic types - water-based, oil-based, and silicone-based - all of which have different properties:

**Water-based lubes** are generally considered most user-friendly and all-purpose of the three types. They don't deteriorate latex, so they're safe to use with condoms, dams, diaphragms, and other latex safer-sex products. For most people, water-based lubes are non-irritating, user-friendly, and easy to clean up. A number of these lubes also contain glycerin however, which may cause yeast infections in some women. They can also dry out relatively quickly, but adding a little more lube, water, or saliva will get you sliding smoothly again.

**Oil-based lubes** like Vaseline or lotion are not recommended for safer sex because they break down latex. They can also leave a coating on the vagina or rectum that can lead to infections. Males masturbating alone, though, can use oil-based lubes as a way to avoid chafing or to simply try something new.

**Silicone-based lubes** are the newest on the market. Like water-based lubes, they're safe to use with condoms and other latex products, but they last longer. Silicone lubes can also be used in the water without being washed off. However, this means they're harder to clean up after: you'll have to use soap and water. If you're using silicone lube with sex toys, you may want to use caution, since it can damage sex-toys made of silicone. Using a condom over the toy or choosing a water-based lube can help avoid mishaps.

Within these broader categories, you can find more specific kinds of lube, such as flavored lubes for oral sex or lubes that contain a spermicide like nonoxynol-9. Note that nonoxynol-9 can cause irritation, which may increase one's risk of contracting HIV. If you have sensitive
skin, you may want to do a spot-test on your inner arm or thigh the day before you plan to use any new lube in order to make sure you don't have an unwanted allergic reaction.

Overall, lubes are a great way to enhance pleasure during sex. There are hundreds of different varieties available, so with a little experimenting, just about everybody can find a lube that makes their sex life both more slippery and satisfying.

Alice!

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