

QUICKIES: lube!

a sex ed summary from scarleteen.com

Can't figure out why masturbation feels really good until it suddenly starts feeling like you're being rubbed raw? Wondering how to keep intercourse from being painful or uncomfortable? Curious how to use condoms properly to reduce the risk of pregnancy or STIs?

The answer (or part of the answer, anyway) is: lube!

Lube is short for lubricant, a liquid-y substance that makes things slipperier. Lube makes many kinds of sex wetter and comfier. It also makes sex safer by making it less likely a condom will break.

You may hear people say our bodies produce lube on their own. Whether that's true depends on which body part we're talking about, and it's also not always the case for everyone, or for anyone, all the time. The vagina produces its own fluids, but the amount varies from day to day and person to person. The penis also produces fluids, like pre-ejaculate. Then there's your mouth, which can produce saliva, or spit. Sometimes, the lube made by your body is enough to keep sex or masturbation feeling good for everyone. Other times, you need to add some more.

Why do people use lube? Here are some common ways and reasons:

- **Vaginal sex:** Putting anything comfortably inside the vagina requires lubrication. Using lots of lube helps vaginal sex feel good, rather than painful or uncomfortable.
- **Anal sex:** The anus and rectum don't produce their own fluids the way the vagina does. So, using lube is necessary in order to have safe, pleasurable, anal sex.
- **Masturbation:** Lube can make masturbation more fun and comfortable.
- **Oral sex:** If you're performing oral sex, putting flavored lube on the outside of the condom or dental dam can make it more enjoyable. If you're receiving oral sex, having non-flavored lube on the inside of the condom or dental dam can make it more pleasurable.

What kinds of lube are there? When we talk about lube, we usually describe it by its "base." The base is the main thing the lube is made from, and it effects how the lube feels on your skin. The main kinds of lube you can buy are:

- **Water based:** This is the most common type of lube. It's easy to clean up and doesn't stain fabric. It dries up quicker than other kinds of lube. That means you might have to keep applying it during sex or masturbation.

- **Oil based:** This kind of lube can break down latex. Since most condoms are made from latex, oil-based lube is **not** safe to use with them. If you like the way oil-based lube feels, you can use it during masturbation or with nonlatex condoms and other barriers.
- **Silicone based:** This doesn't dry up or absorb into the skin. That means it lasts longer during sex than water-based lube. However, it can stain things like sheets. It's harder to clean up and more expensive than water-based lube.
- **Flavored:** You can use this during oral sex. Flavored lube often has sweeteners in it, which can increase the risk of yeast infections. So, it shouldn't go in or on the vagina or vulva.
- **Warming or cooling:** These are usually condom-safe. But, the added ingredients to create the heating or cooling effect can irritate the genitals. Cooling or numbing lube can also make people not realize something is hurting them, because they can't feel what's actually going on.

How do you choose a lube? The simplest way to find a lube that you like is to try out different kinds. You can do this during masturbation, or with a partner during sex. Sometimes stores will have testers of lube so you can see how it feels on your hands before you buy it.

When choosing a lube, you want it to feel nice on your skin. You can also smell lube to make sure the scent doesn't make you gag. If you're planning to use lube for oral sex, you'll also want to check the taste.

You can find lube many places. Drugstores, grocery stores, and super stores all carry lube. If you're 18 or older, you can also buy lube at a sex toy store. Doctors offices and health centers often have lube that patients can ask for or take for free.

You might be worried that using lube means you're doing sex or masturbation "wrong." It can help to think of lube as just one of the many tools you can use to make sex enjoyable. Using lube is not an indication of how sexy you think a partner is. It doesn't mean you hate the sex you're having. And it says nothing about how "good" you or a partner are at sex. It's simply a way of making sex safer, smoother, and more pleasurable for everyone involved.

This handout was prepared by Sam Wall and is a summary of **Lube 101: A Slick Little Primer** (https://www.scarleteen.com/article/bodies/lube_101_a_slick_little_primer) by Jenna Gaarde and Claire Phelan.

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