Can using lube during sex prevent STIs? [1]

Dear Alice,

Can commercial lubes (that are suggested to be used during sexual intercourse) decrease the possibility of being infected by STIs (sexual transmitted infections)?

Answer

Dear Reader,

Yes, yes, yes! Sexual lubricant, natural or store bought, greases the wheels for a safer and more pleasurable ride. For one, extra lube keeps condoms (your best STI protection) from breaking. Lube also prevents chafing. Friction from too little lubrication during sex can cause tiny tears in the vagina or anus and provide openings for STIs and HIV to enter the body. Using lubrication helps prevent these tears.

All lubes are not created equal though. Water-based lubes are a favorite since they play well with condoms and clean up easily. Using oil-based lubricants such as petroleum jelly, vegetable oil, or baby oil with latex condoms is a no-no. Oil damages latex, making condoms more permeable to STIs and more likely to break. For an extra slippery feel that's latex-friendly, you may want to try a silicone-based lube. Just note that silicone doesn't dissolve easily, so you may need to wash up with soapy water.

When shopping for lubrication, be careful not to confuse lube with spermicidal jelly or foam. These contraceptive products contain the chemical nonoxynol-9, also known as N-9, which kills sperm. However, spermicide can also irritate or damage sensitive skin in the genital area, making you more susceptible to STIs. Be on the lookout for condoms coated with N-9 or lubes containing N-9. Although these rubbers may offer an extra dose of pregnancy prevention, the N-9 can up the chances of STI transmission.

Using condoms properly is the most effective way to protect against STIs, but getting wetter certainly makes it better!

Alice!

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