

What's fisting? ^[1]

Dear Alice,

I have a question. My friends often make jokes about something called "fisting." I feel really left out when they joke about it, so could you please tell me what fisting is?! Thanks a lot.

Just wondering

Answer

Dear Just wondering,

It's understandable that you may not be up to speed on fisting. Chances are, most parents and health teachers don't cover this technique during the birds and bees talk. For now, they're excused, considering birds and bees don't have fists. Fisting is when a person puts their entire hand into another's anus or vagina. For those who enjoy this activity, it can be a highly intense and pleasurable feeling for both the receiving and giving partner. While many enjoy the sensations, there can be risks involved. Fisting can create intense pleasure, but can also cause pain and tissue damage. Throughout the experience, it's critical to keep the lines of communication open and check in frequently with partners about how they feel. The key is to go slow and talk about how it feels, and set the expectation that any partner can decide to stop at any point. It's a sexual activity that requires trust, communication, preparation, relaxation, patience... and lots of lube.

Spontaneity can be great, but this is an activity where it's worth spending time doing some homework before getting a fist wet. For safety's sake, it's best that fingernails on the hand that's going in be as short and smooth as possible. Next, it's time to gather safer sex materials, including a few pairs of latex or non-latex exam gloves and ample lube. Like condoms or dental dams, the gloves act as a barrier against transmission of any sexually transmitted infections, and as a bonus the material makes entry smoother. For vaginal fisting, water-based lube is a good choice since it's generally non-irritating; silicone lube could also be used, as a thicker option. For anal play, an oil-, water-, or silicone-based lube can provide long-lasting lubrication. One disadvantage of oil-based lubes is that it can break down latex; that being said, another option can be to use nitrile gloves, which are oil-resistant. Another consideration is that oil-based lubricants can block pores and cause acne breakouts for those with sensitive skin. For more

information about lube varieties, check [All about lube](#) ^[2] in the *Go Ask Alice!* [Sexual & Reproductive Health](#) ^[3] archives.

Before diving in, it might be helpful to engage in a lengthy session of foreplay to loosen up. It can be helpful to apply plenty of lube to the fisting hand, completely coating the flat parts of the hand as well as the fingers and thumb. When the receiving partner feels ready, it's good to begin by *slowly* inserting the fingers, one at a time, into the vagina or anus, eventually entering the body with the hand in the shape of a duckbill. When reaching further in, the fingers might curl over the thumb to make a fist. In this situation, it might be good to have the receiving partner call the shots and let their partner know what feels good or doesn't. Once the hand is inside, the fisting partner may try gently clenching and releasing the hand as if squeezing a stress ball to "fill up" the receiving partner. Due to pressure of the vaginal wall or anus, the fisting partner may feel like their hand is being squeezed uncomfortably. If this happens, it's good to be careful not to jerk out the hand suddenly, which may hurt the receiving partner. It can be helpful to check in when it comes time to remove the fist so both partners are ready. It may be easier to remove when the receiving partner orgasms. To remove the hand, the fisting partner can gently uncurl the fist while sliding the hand out.

With patience and practice, fisting can be an incredibly fulfilling experience, but there are risks involved. If the receiving partner has any pain, fever, or bleeding afterwards, it's highly advised to seek medical care right away — these symptoms may indicate a tear in the vagina or rectum. In a couple of rare cases, fisting mishaps have led to the death of the receiving partner, which is why communication, taking it slow, and paying attention to any symptoms associated with the act are so key.

With an awareness of the risks and a commitment to care, communication, and preparation, fisting can be a deeply enjoyable experience for those who seek it out.

Alice!

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