Is there any lubricant that's safe for baby-making sex?  [1]

Dear Alice,

My husband and I are trying to conceive our first child and I've read that lubricant can inhibit the sperm from reaching the egg. Is there any lubricant that is safe for baby-making sex, or are there any alternatives that may be useful? Also, I was wondering how much lubricant decreases your chances of conceiving. Is water-based just as harmful as oil-based?

Answer

Dear Reader,

Lubricants can make it harder for the sperm to move on their own, inhibiting their ability to swim to the egg once inside the vagina. Even using saliva as a lubricant may impact sperm motility. While there isn’t a set amount of lubricant that’s too much for conception, there are different products that may be more helpful for baby-making purposes. To help the sperm move as naturally as possible, it’s best to use lube that closely resembles vaginal mucus (including the pH levels, which are approximately 3.5 to 4.5) for the greatest sperm protection. To help consumers differentiate these lubricants, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has a special category of products that have been tested to ensure that there’s no harm to sperm or eggs. If you’re concerned about baby-making safety, this category of lubricants may be your best bet. Read on if you want to “wet” your appetite on lubricant information.

There are four major lubricant bases: water, silicone, oil, and natural. Water-based lubricants are the most common and are often mixed with moisturizers to reduce the side effects of friction. However, water-based lubricants may contain a chemical called glycerin, which can lead to infection, and usually don’t last very long. Oil-based lubricants are another option. Although these lubricants aren’t advised for penetrative sex with a latex condom (they break it down), they’re a longer lasting choice. That being said, oil-based lubes may also leave you more susceptible to bacterial infections and tend to be messier, compared to water-based lubes. The silicone-based lubricants are hypoallergenic and often feel “thicker” because they aren’t readily absorbed into the skin, which may mean they last a little longer.

Natural lubricants are a slightly different story. Although natural lubes such as coconut oil and canola oil are becoming increasingly popular as a form of lube, it's generally advised to avoid
household oils as sex lubricants. These oils can react with the air outside of the container or sunlight in ways that may be harmful to your body, not to mention sperm. If you decide that these types of oils are what feels best for you, you may consider keeping a container exclusively for the bedroom and follow storage instructions carefully. If it’s not getting as slippery as you’d like, you can try using warm water, which is sperm friendly. Nothing fancy — you can leave the seltzer and mineral water for drinking.

All this to say, the lubes that are least likely to harm sperm are those that have been FDA-approved as safe for fertility. If you’re having trouble finding those lubes in the store, here are some other considerations you may want to keep in mind when choosing a product:

- Avoid lubricants with a high acidity (low pH).
- Avoid lubricants with chemicals such as nonoxynol-9 (spermicide), glycerin, petroleum, chlorhexidine gluconate, propylene glycol, or any other chemicals that may increase risk of harm to sperm, irritation, or infection.
- Be wary of anything listed as “organic” or “natural,” as these labels don’t necessarily mean that they’re fertility-safe.
- Look for lubricants with hydroxyethcellulose, as these lubes most closely resemble vaginal mucus.

The bottom line is that the type of lubricant you use can make a difference in your ability to conceive. Hopefully with this information, you’ll feel more equipped for picking the lube that best suits your needs. If you’re still unsure, you may consider speaking with your health care provider about types and brands of lubricants that are best for fertility purposes. Best of luck in your efforts!

Alice!

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