

# Soft and squishy materials and how to think about them



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# Materials



<https://unsplash.com/photos/xzPMUMDDsfk>

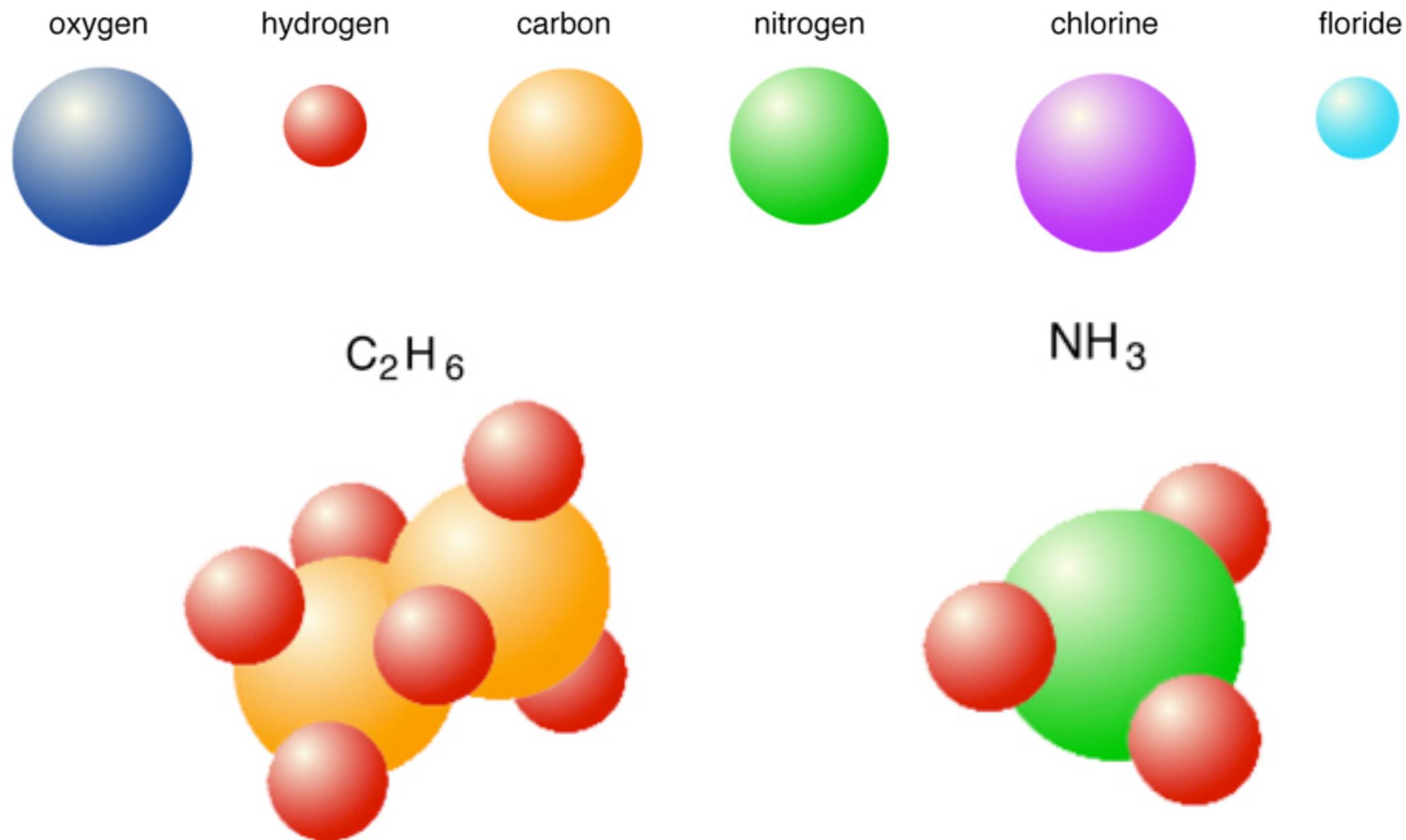


Wikipedia

# All matter is made of atoms

1 <b>H</b> Hydrogen																	2 <b>He</b> Helium																													
3 <b>Li</b> Lithium	4 <b>Be</b> Beryllium											5 <b>B</b> Boron	6 <b>C</b> Carbon	7 <b>N</b> Nitrogen	8 <b>O</b> Oxygen	9 <b>F</b> Fluorine	10 <b>Ne</b> Neon																													
11 <b>Na</b> Sodium	12 <b>Mg</b> Magnesium											13 <b>Al</b> Aluminum	14 <b>Si</b> Silicon	15 <b>P</b> Phosphorus	16 <b>S</b> Sulfur	17 <b>Cl</b> Chlorine	18 <b>Ar</b> Argon																													
19 <b>K</b> Potassium	20 <b>Ca</b> Calcium	21 <b>Sc</b> Scandium	22 <b>Ti</b> Titanium	23 <b>V</b> Vanadium	24 <b>Cr</b> Chromium	25 <b>Mn</b> Manganese	26 <b>Fe</b> Iron	27 <b>Co</b> Cobalt	28 <b>Ni</b> Nickel	29 <b>Cu</b> Copper	30 <b>Zn</b> Zinc	31 <b>Ga</b> Gallium	32 <b>Ge</b> Germanium	33 <b>As</b> Arsenic	34 <b>Se</b> Selenium	35 <b>Br</b> Bromine	36 <b>Kr</b> Krypton																													
37 <b>Rb</b> Rubidium	38 <b>Sr</b> Strontium	39 <b>Y</b> Yttrium	40 <b>Zr</b> Zirconium	41 <b>Nb</b> Niobium	42 <b>Mo</b> Molybdenum	43 <b>Tc</b> Technetium	44 <b>Ru</b> Ruthenium	45 <b>Rh</b> Rhodium	46 <b>Pd</b> Palladium	47 <b>Ag</b> Silver	48 <b>Cd</b> Cadmium	49 <b>In</b> Indium	50 <b>Sn</b> Tin	51 <b>Sb</b> Antimony	52 <b>Te</b> Tellurium	53 <b>I</b> Iodine	54 <b>Xe</b> Xenon																													
55 <b>Cs</b> Cesium	56 <b>Ba</b> Barium											81 <b>Tl</b> Thallium	82 <b>Pb</b> Lead	83 <b>Bi</b> Bismuth	84 <b>Po</b> Polonium	85 <b>At</b> Astatine	86 <b>Rn</b> Radon																													
87 <b>Fr</b> Francium	88 <b>Ra</b> Radium	72 <b>Hf</b> Hafnium	73 <b>Ta</b> Tantalum	74 <b>W</b> Tungsten	75 <b>Re</b> Rhenium	76 <b>Os</b> Osmium	77 <b>Ir</b> Iridium	78 <b>Pt</b> Platinum	79 <b>Au</b> Gold	80 <b>Hg</b> Mercury	113 <b>Nh</b> Nihonium	114 <b>Fl</b> Flerovium	115 <b>Mc</b> Moscovium	116 <b>Lv</b> Livermorium	117 <b>Ts</b> Tennessine	118 <b>Og</b> Oganesson																														
		104 <b>Rf</b> Rutherfordium	105 <b>Db</b> Dubnium	106 <b>Sg</b> Seaborgium	107 <b>Bh</b> Bohrium	108 <b>Hs</b> Hassium	109 <b>Mt</b> Meitnerium	110 <b>Ds</b> Darmstadtium	111 <b>Rg</b> Roentgenium	112 <b>Cn</b> Copernicium																																				
<table border="1"> <tbody> <tr> <td>57 <b>La</b> Lanthanum</td> <td>58 <b>Ce</b> Cerium</td> <td>59 <b>Pr</b> Praseodymium</td> <td>60 <b>Nd</b> Neodymium</td> <td>61 <b>Pm</b> Promethium</td> <td>62 <b>Sm</b> Samarium</td> <td>63 <b>Eu</b> Europium</td> <td>64 <b>Gd</b> Gadolinium</td> <td>65 <b>Tb</b> Terbium</td> <td>66 <b>Dy</b> Dysprosium</td> <td>67 <b>Ho</b> Holmium</td> <td>68 <b>Er</b> Erbium</td> <td>69 <b>Tm</b> Thulium</td> <td>70 <b>Yb</b> Ytterbium</td> <td>71 <b>Lu</b> Lutetium</td> </tr> <tr> <td>89 <b>Ac</b> Actinium</td> <td>90 <b>Th</b> Thorium</td> <td>91 <b>Pa</b> Protactinium</td> <td>92 <b>U</b> Uranium</td> <td>93 <b>Np</b> Neptunium</td> <td>94 <b>Pu</b> Plutonium</td> <td>95 <b>Am</b> Americium</td> <td>96 <b>Cm</b> Curium</td> <td>97 <b>Bk</b> Berkelium</td> <td>98 <b>Cf</b> Californium</td> <td>99 <b>Es</b> Einsteinium</td> <td>100 <b>Fm</b> Fermium</td> <td>101 <b>Md</b> Mendelevium</td> <td>102 <b>No</b> Nobelium</td> <td>103 <b>Lr</b> Lawrencium</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>																	57 <b>La</b> Lanthanum	58 <b>Ce</b> Cerium	59 <b>Pr</b> Praseodymium	60 <b>Nd</b> Neodymium	61 <b>Pm</b> Promethium	62 <b>Sm</b> Samarium	63 <b>Eu</b> Europium	64 <b>Gd</b> Gadolinium	65 <b>Tb</b> Terbium	66 <b>Dy</b> Dysprosium	67 <b>Ho</b> Holmium	68 <b>Er</b> Erbium	69 <b>Tm</b> Thulium	70 <b>Yb</b> Ytterbium	71 <b>Lu</b> Lutetium	89 <b>Ac</b> Actinium	90 <b>Th</b> Thorium	91 <b>Pa</b> Protactinium	92 <b>U</b> Uranium	93 <b>Np</b> Neptunium	94 <b>Pu</b> Plutonium	95 <b>Am</b> Americium	96 <b>Cm</b> Curium	97 <b>Bk</b> Berkelium	98 <b>Cf</b> Californium	99 <b>Es</b> Einsteinium	100 <b>Fm</b> Fermium	101 <b>Md</b> Mendelevium	102 <b>No</b> Nobelium	103 <b>Lr</b> Lawrencium
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# Atoms make molecules

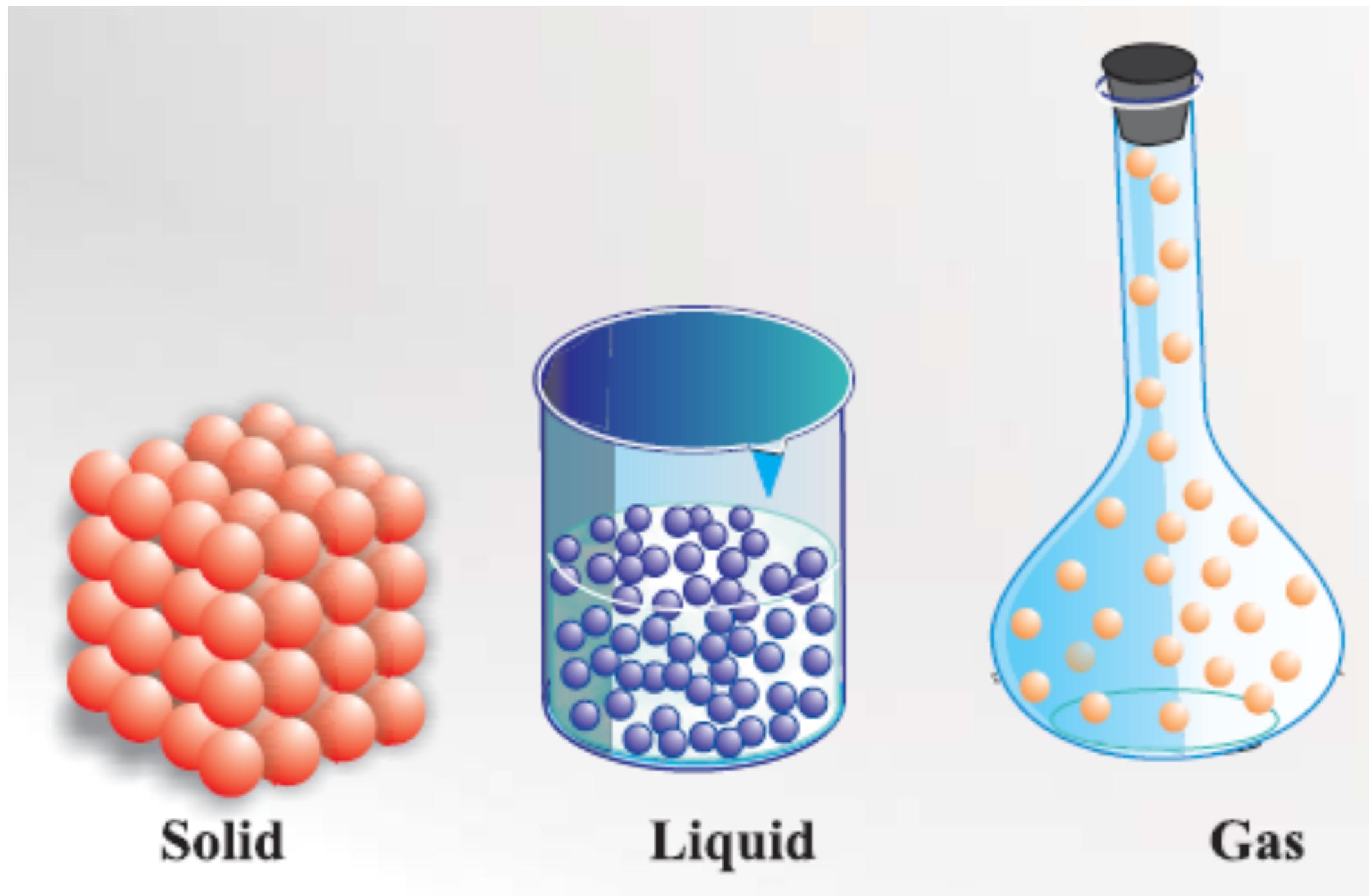


# Molecules can be complex

Polymer



Atoms and molecules can be in different physical states IF there are lots of them



# Ask questions about any material

How are atoms linked? Simple molecules?

Long molecules (polymers)?

Is the material a mixture of different molecules?

Is the substance overall solid, liquid or a bit of both?



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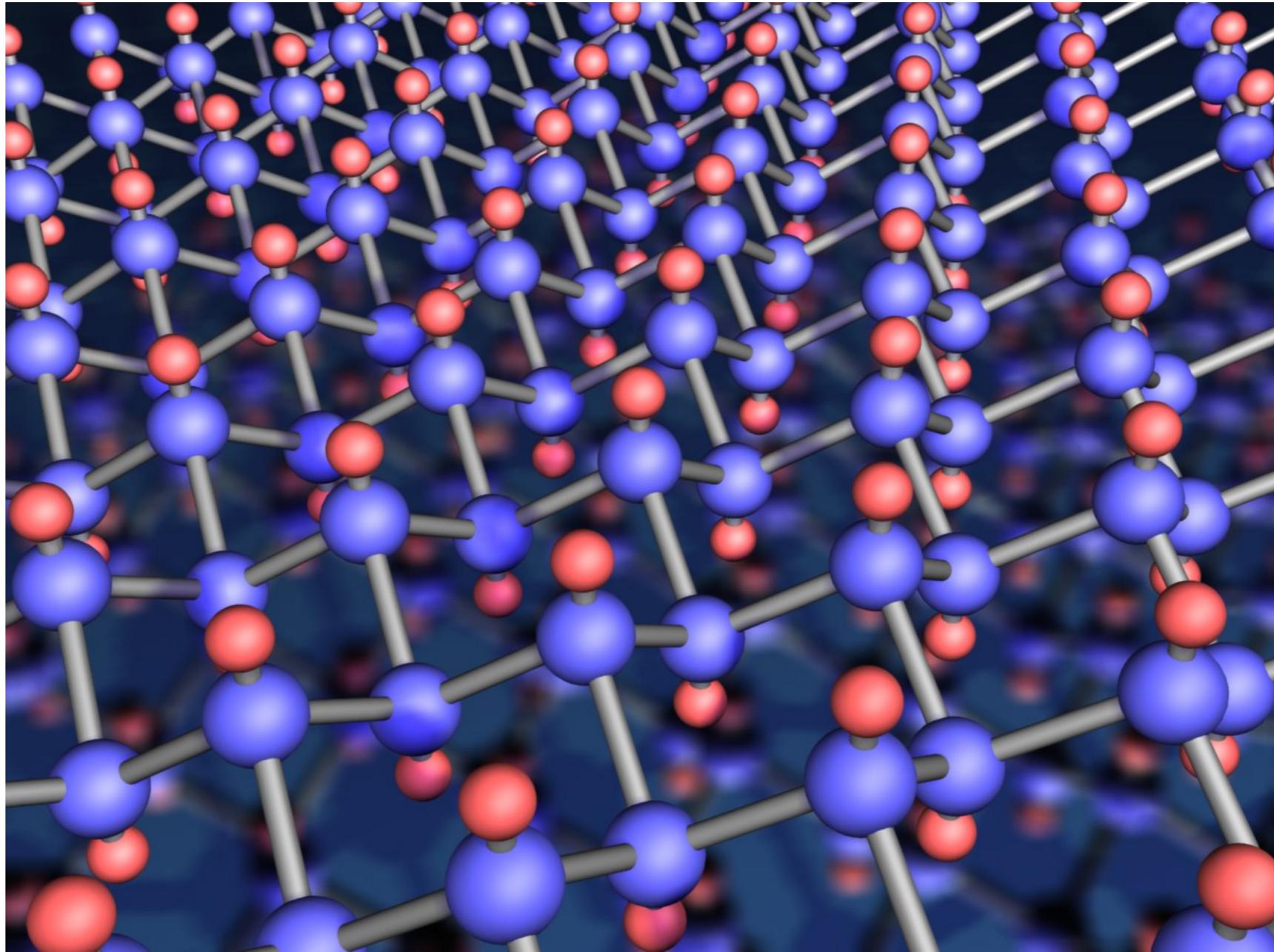
## Soft and squishy materials

- Are usually mixtures of different types of atoms and molecules
- Often include long polymers
- Have properties between those of solids and liquids

# Solid, inflexible (crystalline) materials



# Crystal: Hard to change relative positions of atoms



# Solid, inflexible non-crystalline materials



# Solid, non-crystalline, flexible materials



# Solid, but flexible biological materials



# Fluids



# Suspensions



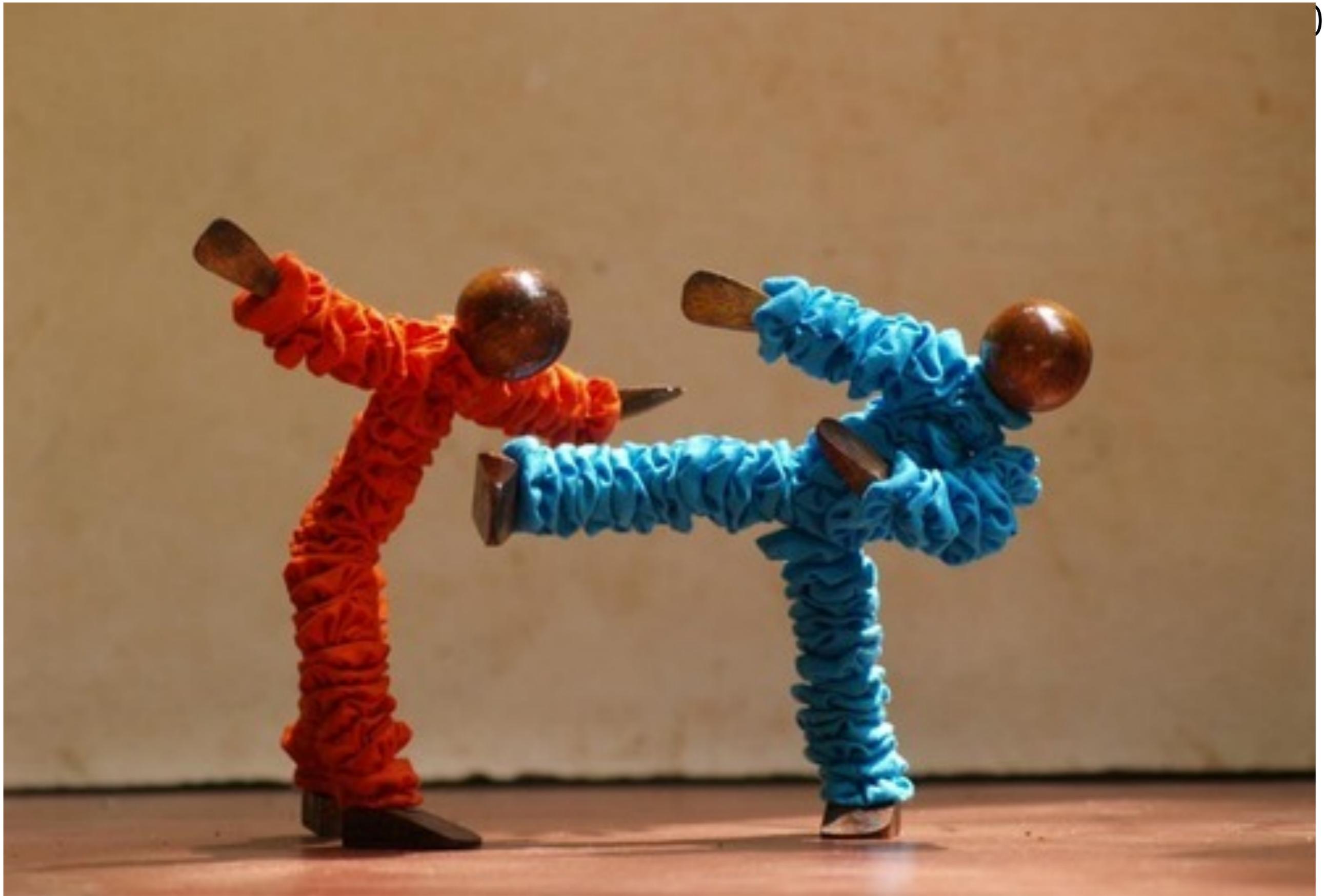


Man-made materials

Get their properties right







A “bendi” toy

But flexible  
living materials  
can also “grow”



Not just  
materials,  
information  
encoded in  
them



<https://www.gettyimages.co.nz/>  
<https://i1.wp.com/www.yogabasics.com/>

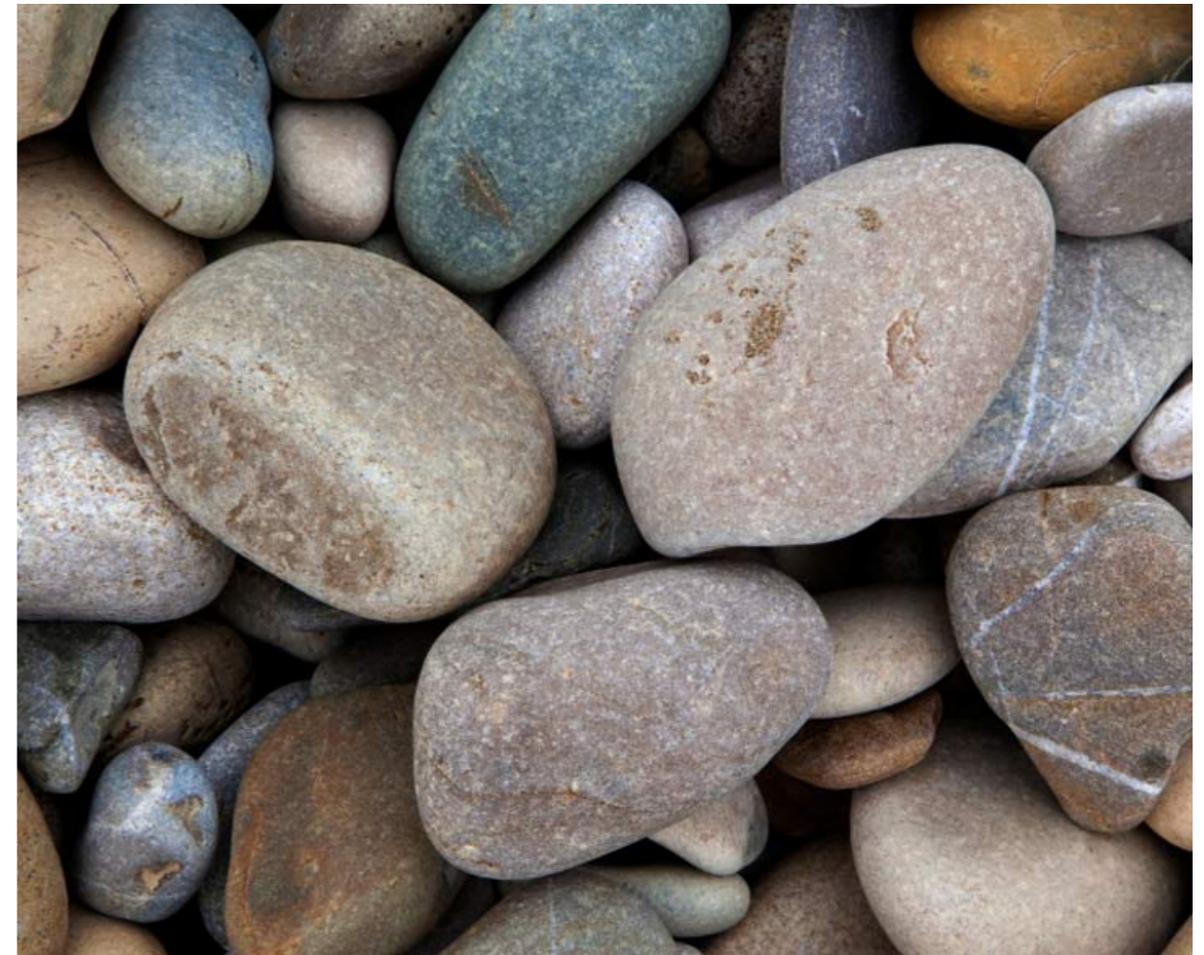


Deformation - a change of shape

Materials that resist being deformed

Materials that are easy to deform

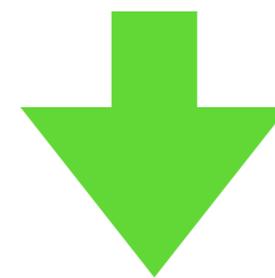
# Materials that resist having their shape changed



# Materials whose shape can be easily changed



It takes the  
“Incredible Hulk” to  
deform this



Soft (and squishy)  
materials don't need  
"Hulk-level" forces to  
deform them

How big should the  
force be?

The "softer" the  
material, the less the  
force



# Slime



<https://www.pinterest.com/pin/3659243425851621/>



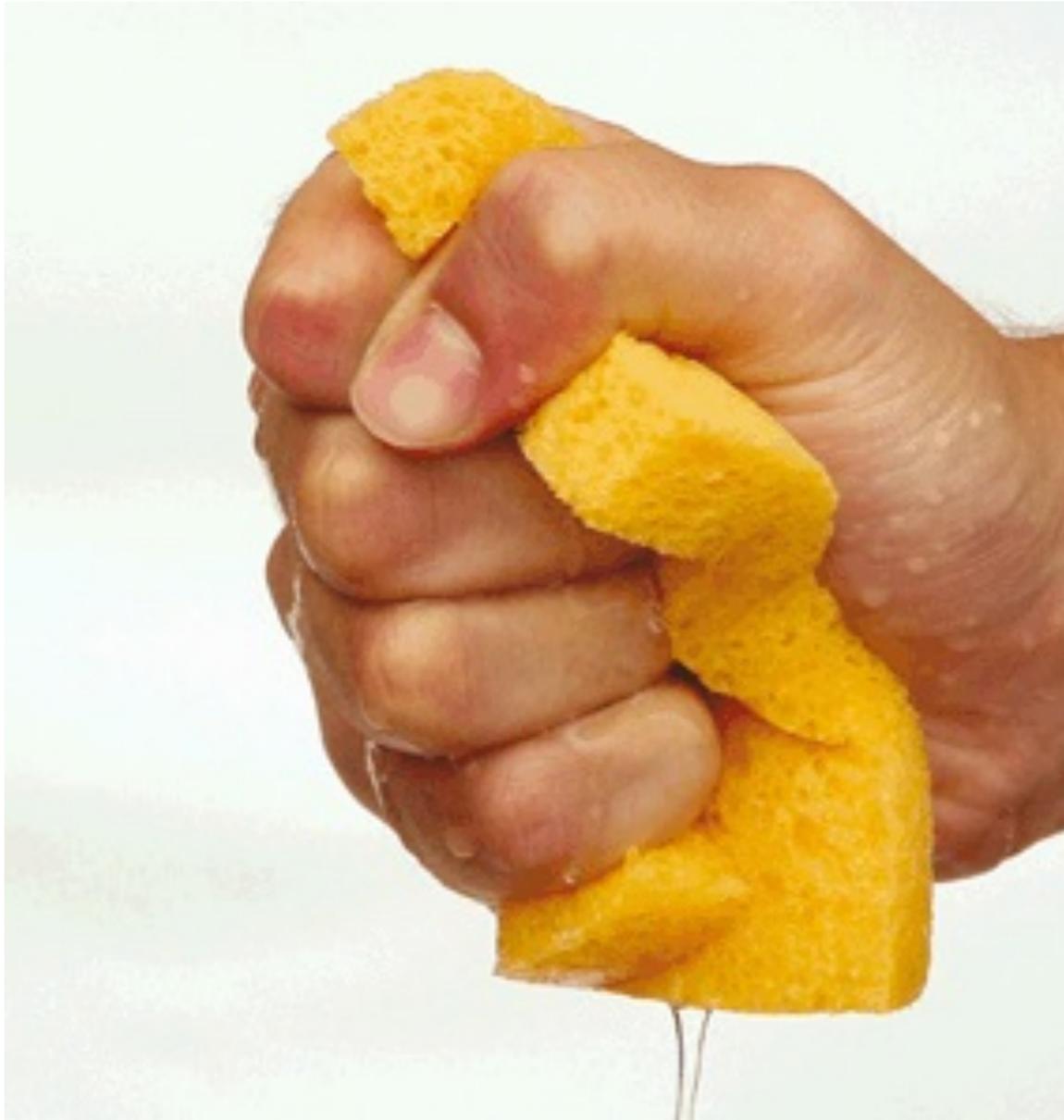
<https://i.pinimg.com/736x/1e/06/50/1e0650f63ebd22be9eb7d0ed80f21fdb.jpg>

# Elasticity

Materials that have a “natural”  
shape

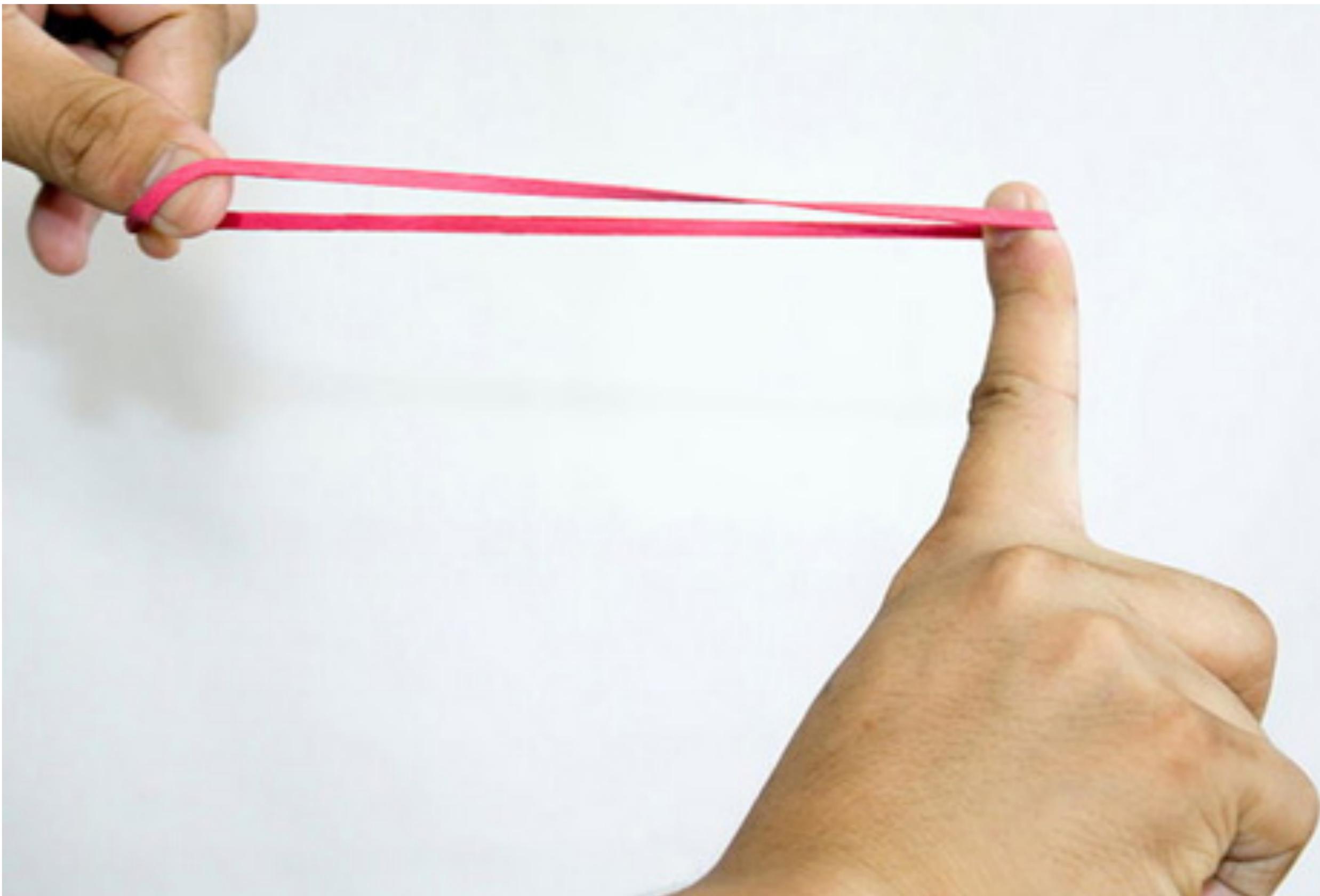
Want to return to that shape, if  
deformed

Goes back to its old shape after you deform it<sup>29</sup>



<https://chembam.files.wordpress.com/2016/07/sponge.jpg>

<https://unlikelyhomemaker.files.wordpress.com/2011/04/sponges.jpg>



# Plasticity

Materials that have a “natural”  
shape

If you deform them too much,  
change shape

Doesn't go back to its old shape after you  
deform it

32



# Fluids: materials that flow

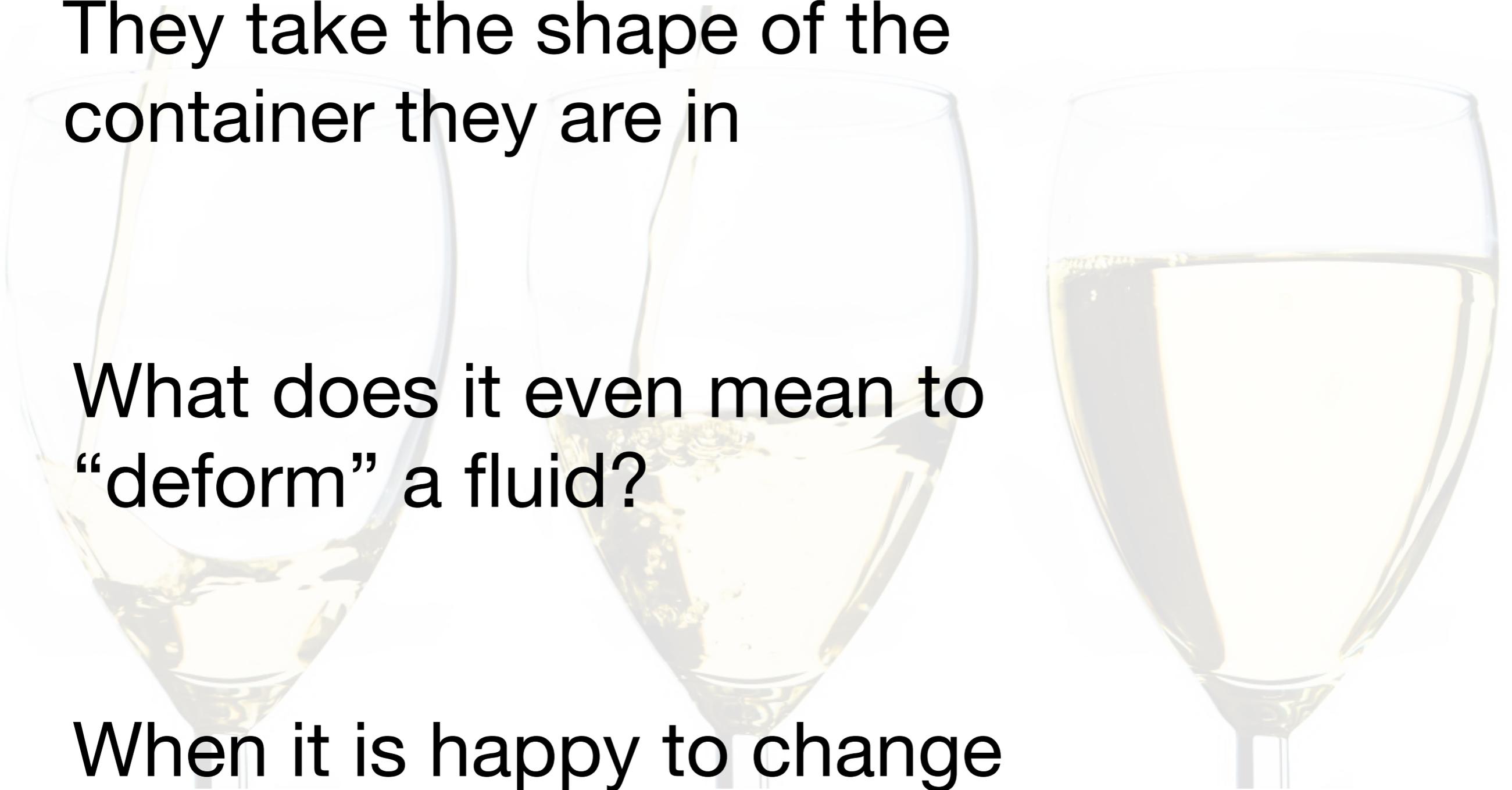
Materials that have no  
“natural” shape



Fluids have no “natural” shape.  
They take the shape of the  
container they are in

What does it even mean to  
“deform” a fluid?

When it is happy to change  
its shape anyway?



Fluids are happy to adapt to any shape you impose on them, so deforming them is fine

But how fast you impose that change matters!

The faster you do this, the more the resistance

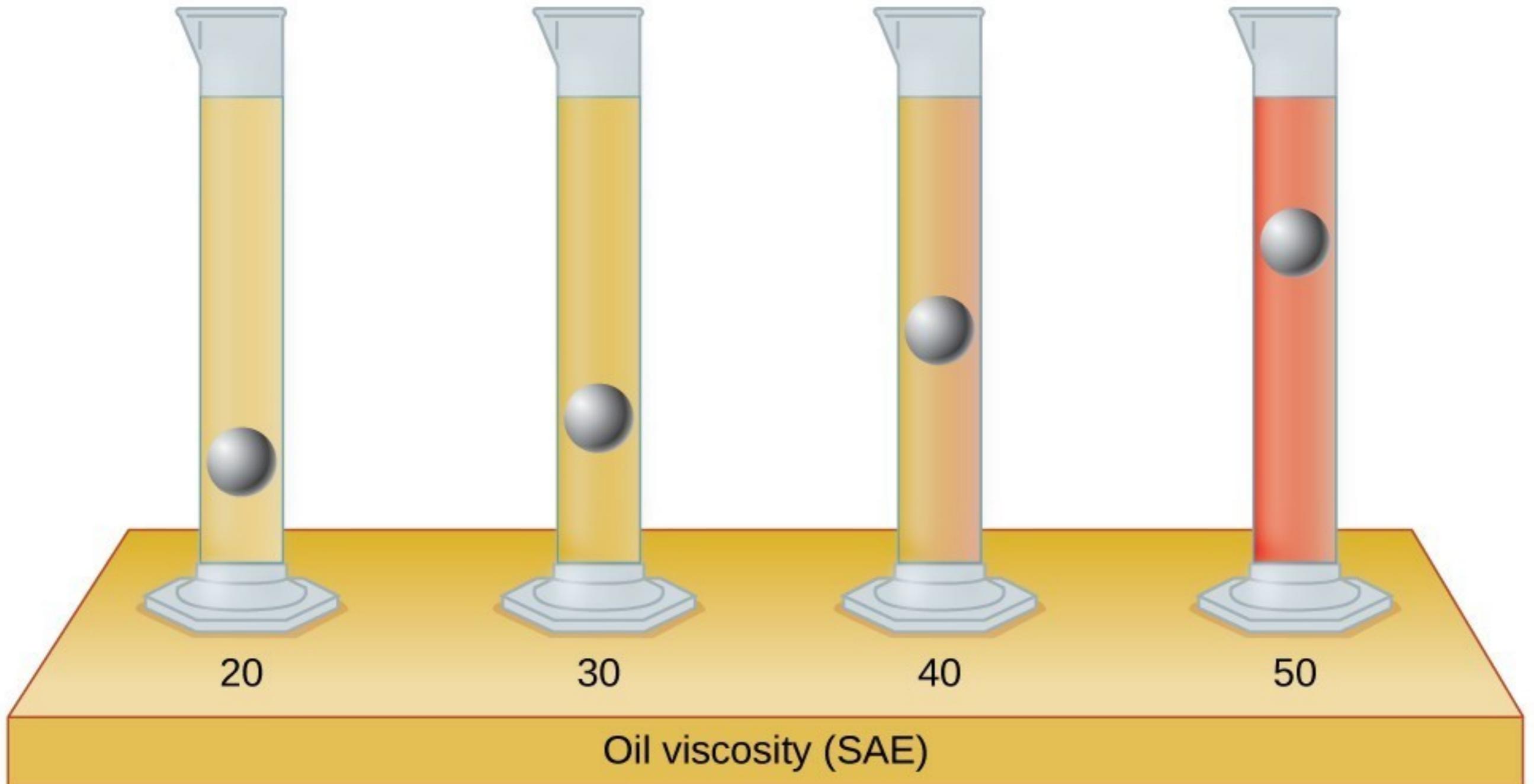
All changes of shape involve  
molecules moving relative to others

Different parts of the liquid don't  
like to move at different speeds

**Viscosity:** Quantifies this

Water and honey, liquids of very  
different viscosity

The more the viscosity, the slower the ball<sup>38</sup>  
falls

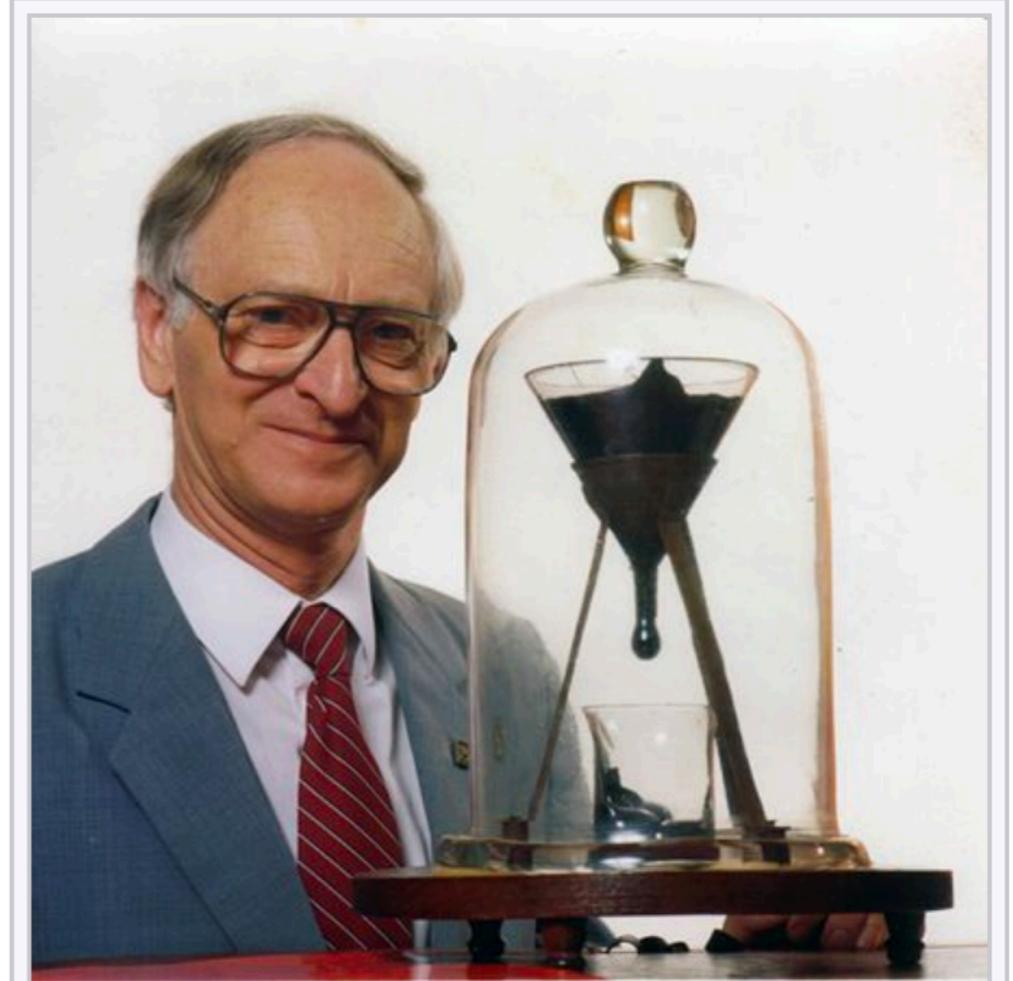


# Longest experiment sees pitch drop after 84-year wait



**PHYSICS** 17 April 2014

By [Lisa Grossman](#) and [Celeste Biever](#)



The [University of Queensland](#) pitch drop experiment, featuring its then-current custodian, Professor John Mainstone (taken in 1990, two years after the seventh drop and 10 years before the eighth drop fell). 

# Materials in-between

Materials that can behave like liquids or like solids, depending on how fast you make them change their shape, and by how much

Shapes change because atoms and molecules move out of their earlier positions to adopt newer ones

If you change the shape too fast, the atoms and molecules can't keep up, resist the change (a solid property)

But if you do so slowly, then can flow smoothly (if they are liquids)

But the molecules can also change their shapes and how they are connected to move more freely

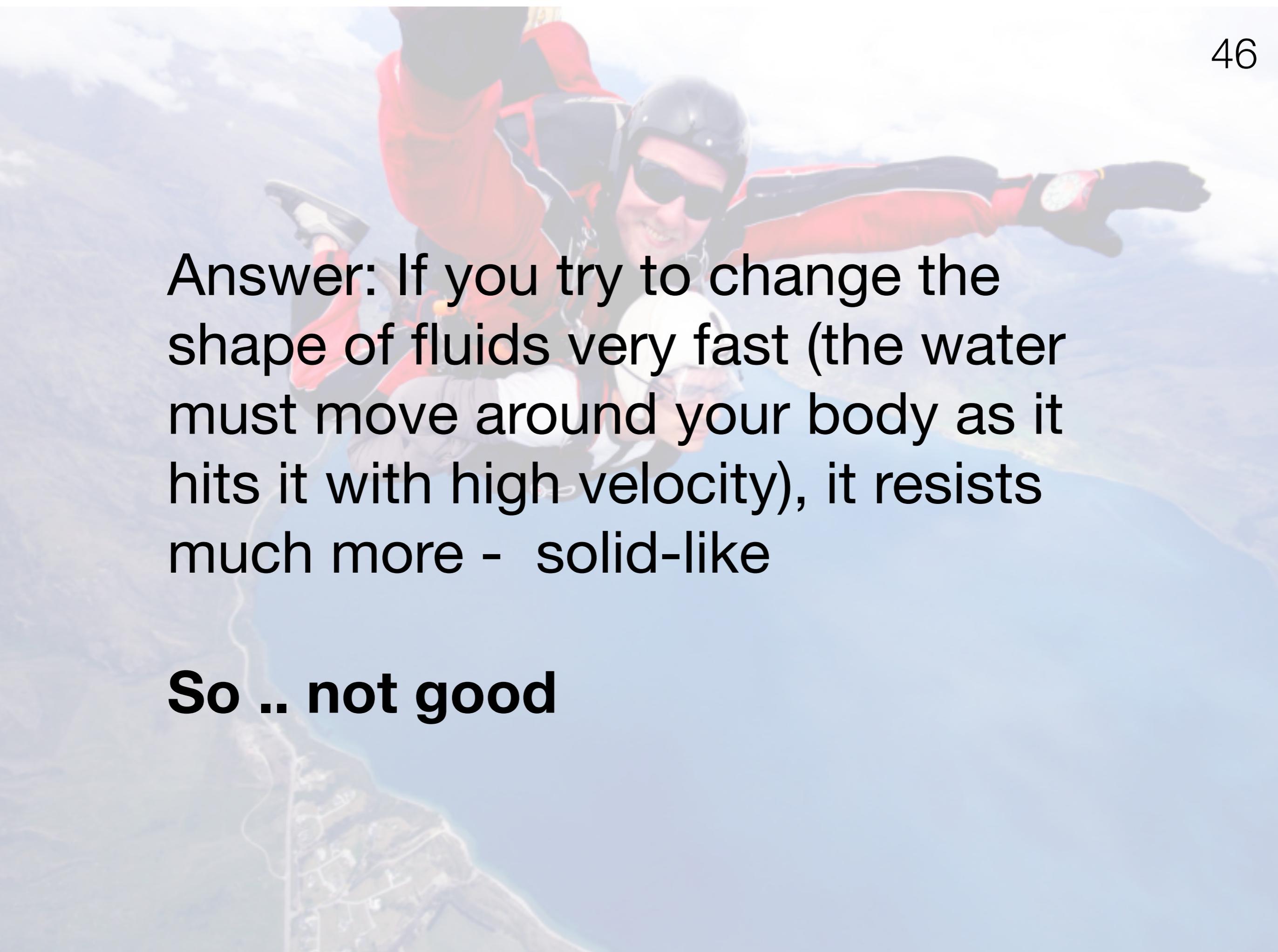




<https://imagesvc.meredithcorp.io/>



Without a parachute to slow you down, what would the experience of jumping into the ocean from an airplane be like?

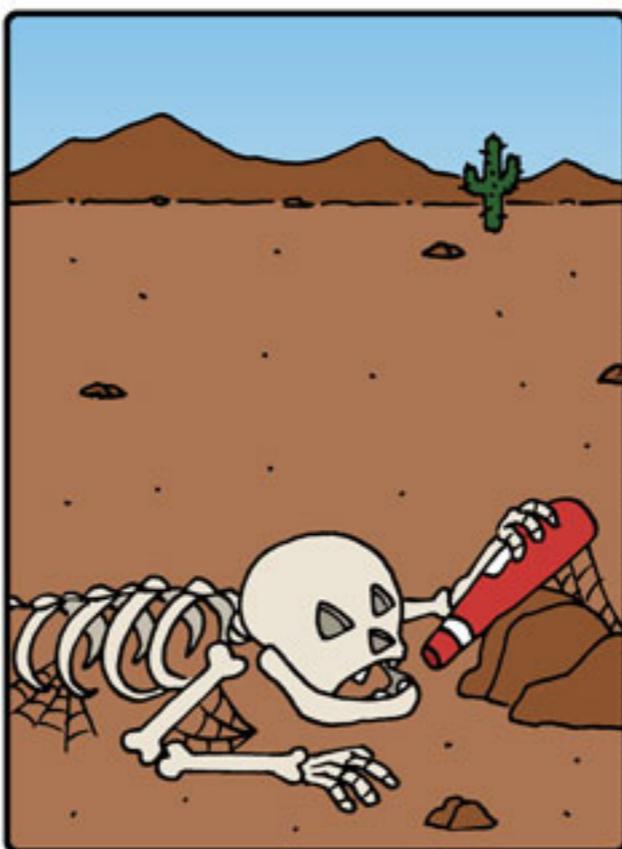


Answer: If you try to change the shape of fluids very fast (the water must move around your body as it hits it with high velocity), it resists much more - solid-like

**So .. not good**







PAGELOW © 2015 Ryan Pagelow BUNICOMIC.COM

Sauce holds  
together,  
doesn't move,  
solid-like (gel)

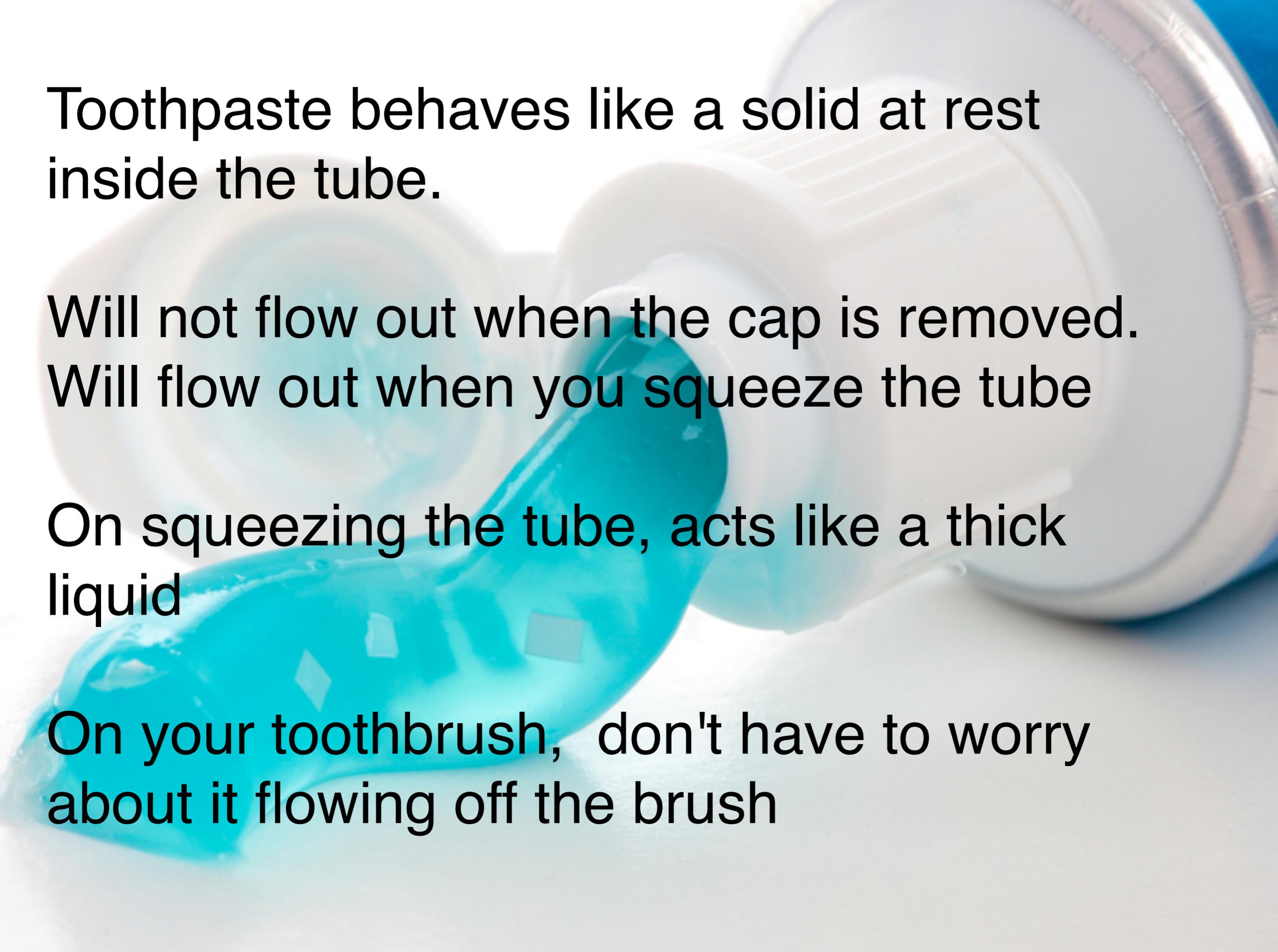
Shake bottle

Sauce  
moves,  
liquid-like



Thixotropy



A close-up photograph of a white tube of toothpaste lying on a white surface. A dollop of bright blue toothpaste is applied to the bristles of a white toothbrush. The background is a soft, out-of-focus white.

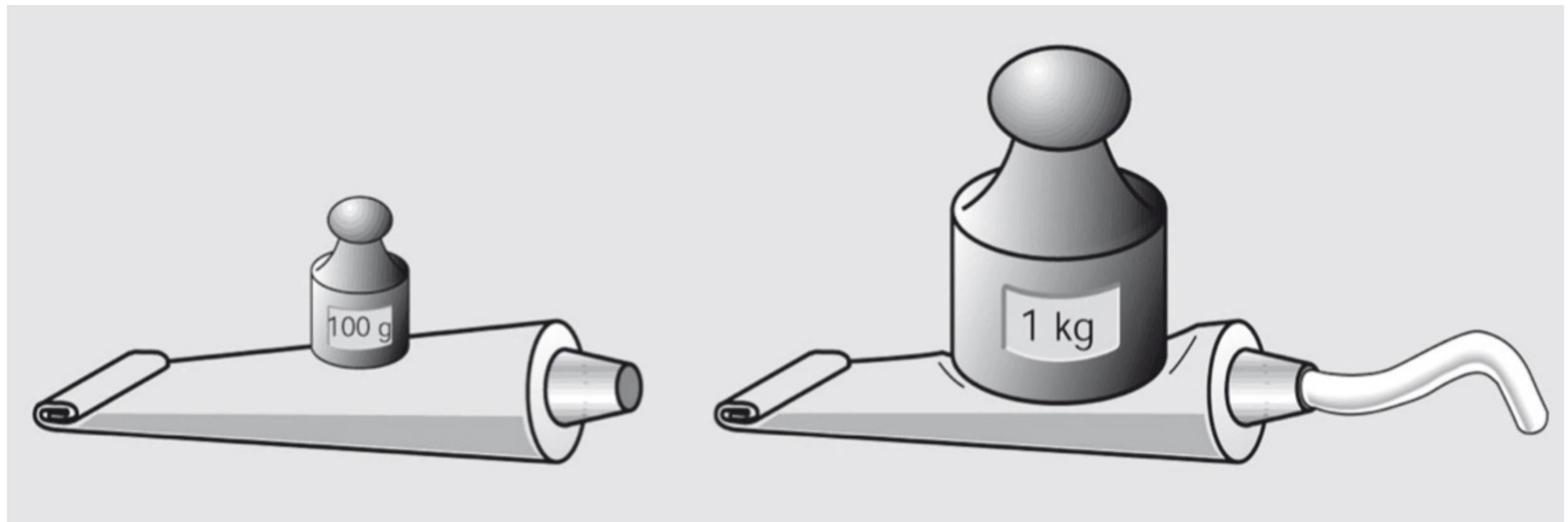
Toothpaste behaves like a solid at rest inside the tube.

Will not flow out when the cap is removed.  
Will flow out when you squeeze the tube

On squeezing the tube, acts like a thick liquid

On your toothbrush, don't have to worry about it flowing off the brush

**Yield point:** Minimum force to be applied to toothpaste tube so it starts to flow



Below the yield point, toothpaste does not flow out of its tube if no force is applied, so behaves solid-like. Above, it flows out.

Bacterial biofilms  
(plaque) build up on  
teeth every 12 to 24  
hours

Toothpaste makes  
brushing more effective

Abrasives in them  
remove stains without  
damaging teeth



Toothpaste foams because it contains a detergent (surfactant), another type of cleaning ingredient

Loosens and breaks down substances on your teeth that would otherwise not be dissolved and rinsed away with water



Other ingredients that retain moisture in the toothpaste and keep ingredients from separating (binding agents)

If toothpaste didn't have these components, it would dry out or require stirring

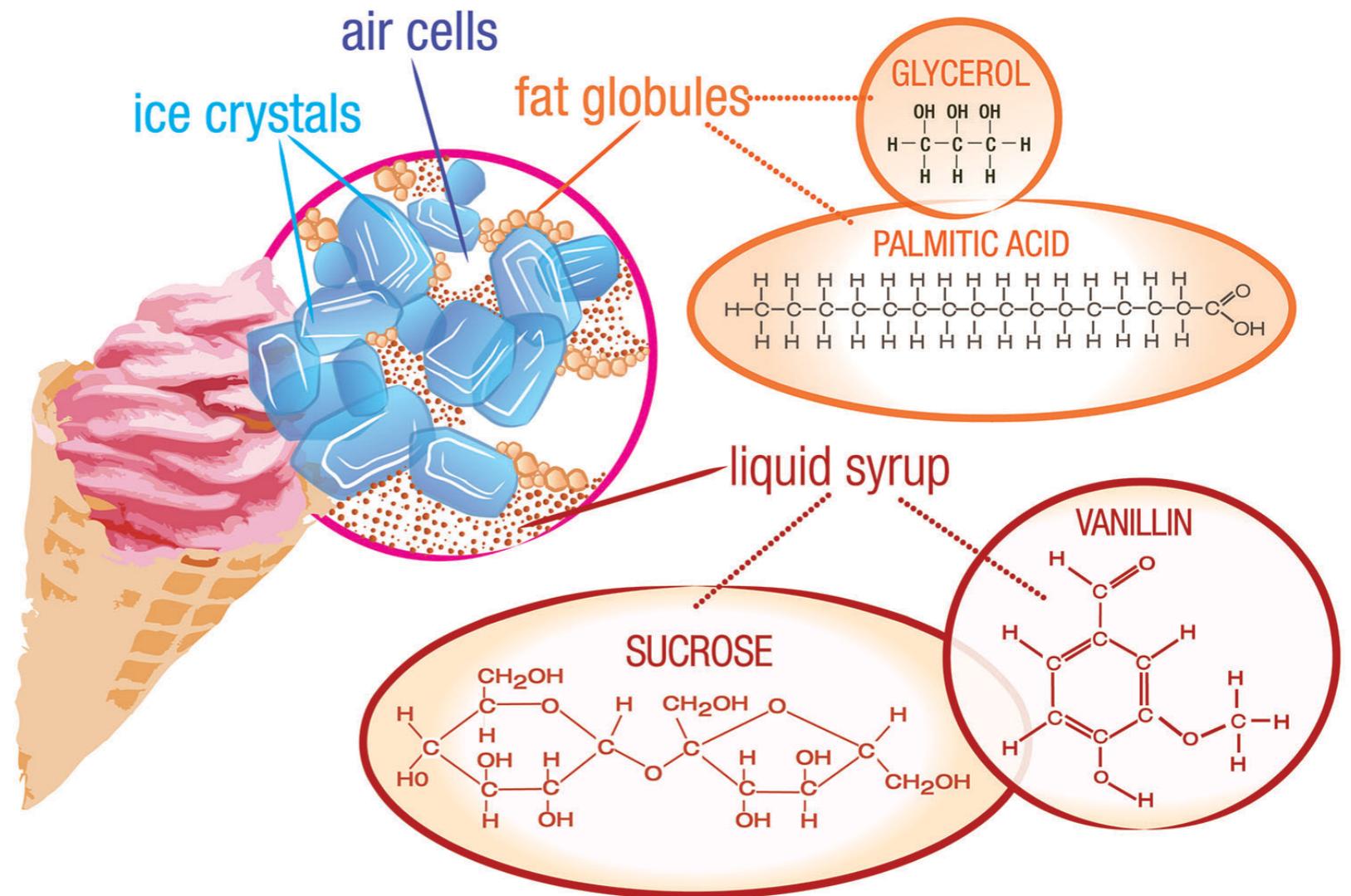
Also flavouring





# Ice cream

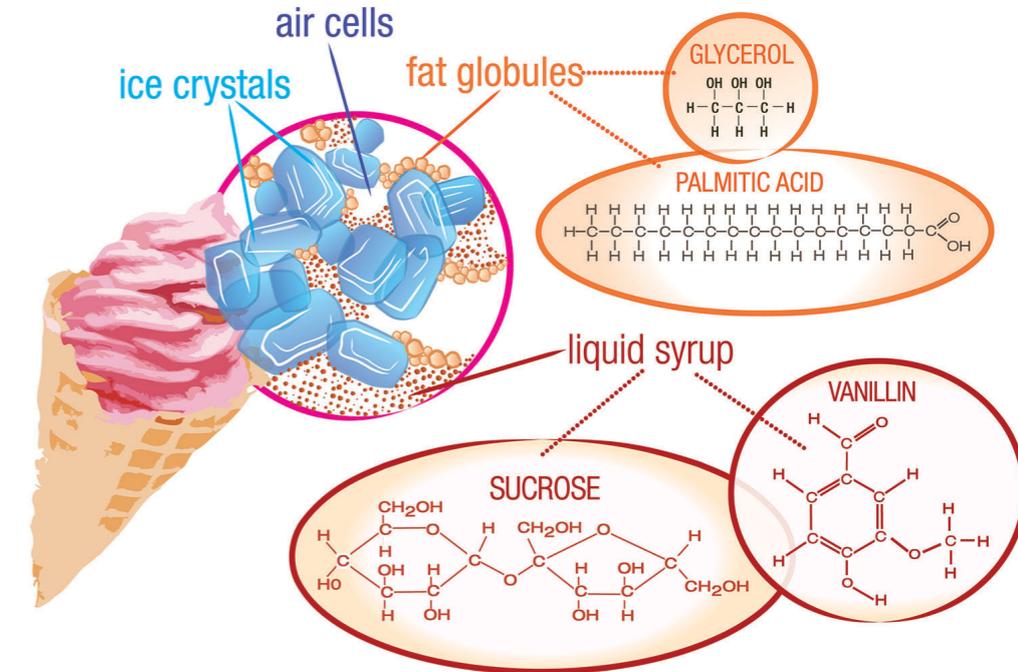
Water,  
sweeteners,  
flavourings,  
emulsifiers,  
stabilisers,  
milk fat and  
milk solids



Ice cream combines two liquids that don't mix

Liquid particles of fat spread through mixture of water, sugar, and ice, with air bubbles

Fat doesn't mix well. Fat content in ice cream has a tendency to separate out



Small air bubbles and ice crystals in water and a network of fat globules

**Emulsifiers:** Make emulsions stable, prevent fat droplets clumping (**surfactants**)

Act like a sponge, absorb and lock in place, liquid

**Stabilizers:** Keep the material uniform. Make texture creamy. Prevent large crystal formation

With stabilizers, ice cream contains small ice crystals that melt more slowly



Ice cream makers add a lot of sugar, usually sucrose or glucose

Cold numbs taste buds, makes them less sensitive. More sugar needs to be added to produce the desired effect at the temperatures at which ice cream is served.

Ice cream at room temperature tastes very sweet.



Ice crystals that form when ice cream freezes are important to quality of ice cream

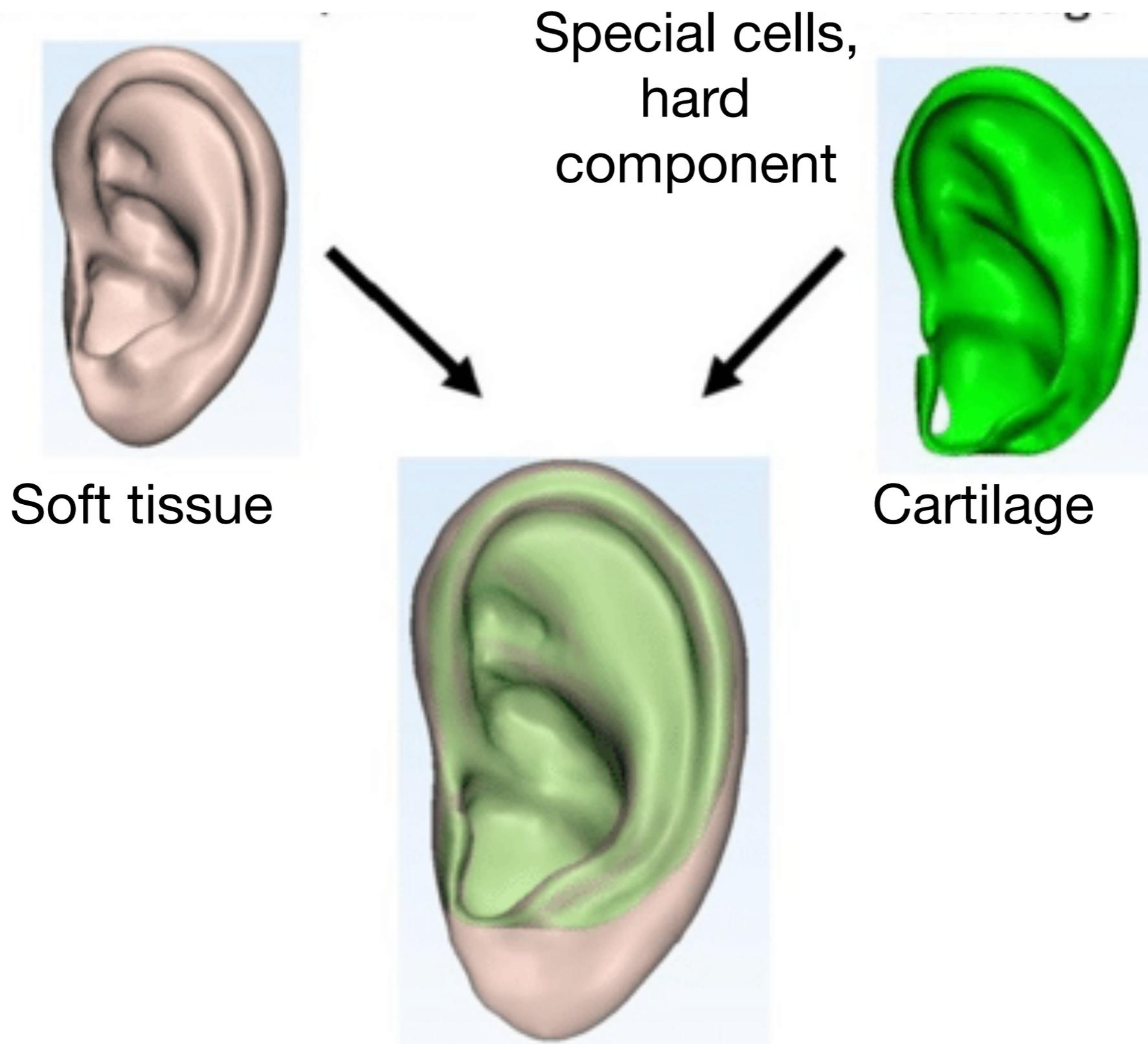
Soft serve ice cream, requires small ice crystals. So ice cream needs to be frozen quickly.

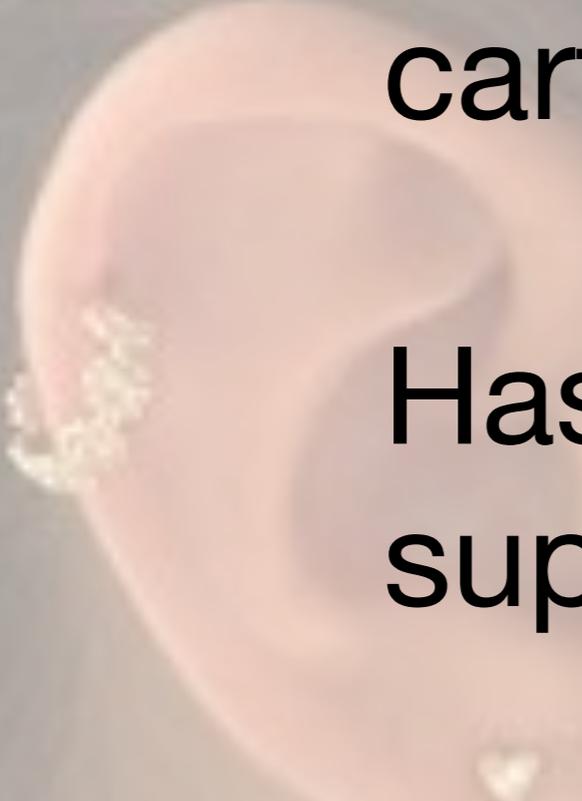
However, ice cream still about 60% water. When served at usual temperatures, not all of it is frozen

Ice cream then “scoopable”









Earlobe has no  
cartilage

Has a large blood  
supply

Highly elastic

Soft, living, self-  
repairing material



A soft but solid  
material

Can grow and heal

Flows very slowly if  
you apply a force





The new coronavirus is tiny

Little particles produced by people when they breathe, talk and cough invisible to the naked eye, easily able to float in air.

Mostly biological fluids from people's mouths and lungs

Mucus can carry coronavirus particles

Mucus is 95% water, 3% proteins (including mucin and antibodies), 1% salt and other substances.

Mucin droplets absorb water. Swell several hundred times in volume within three seconds of release from mucus glands.

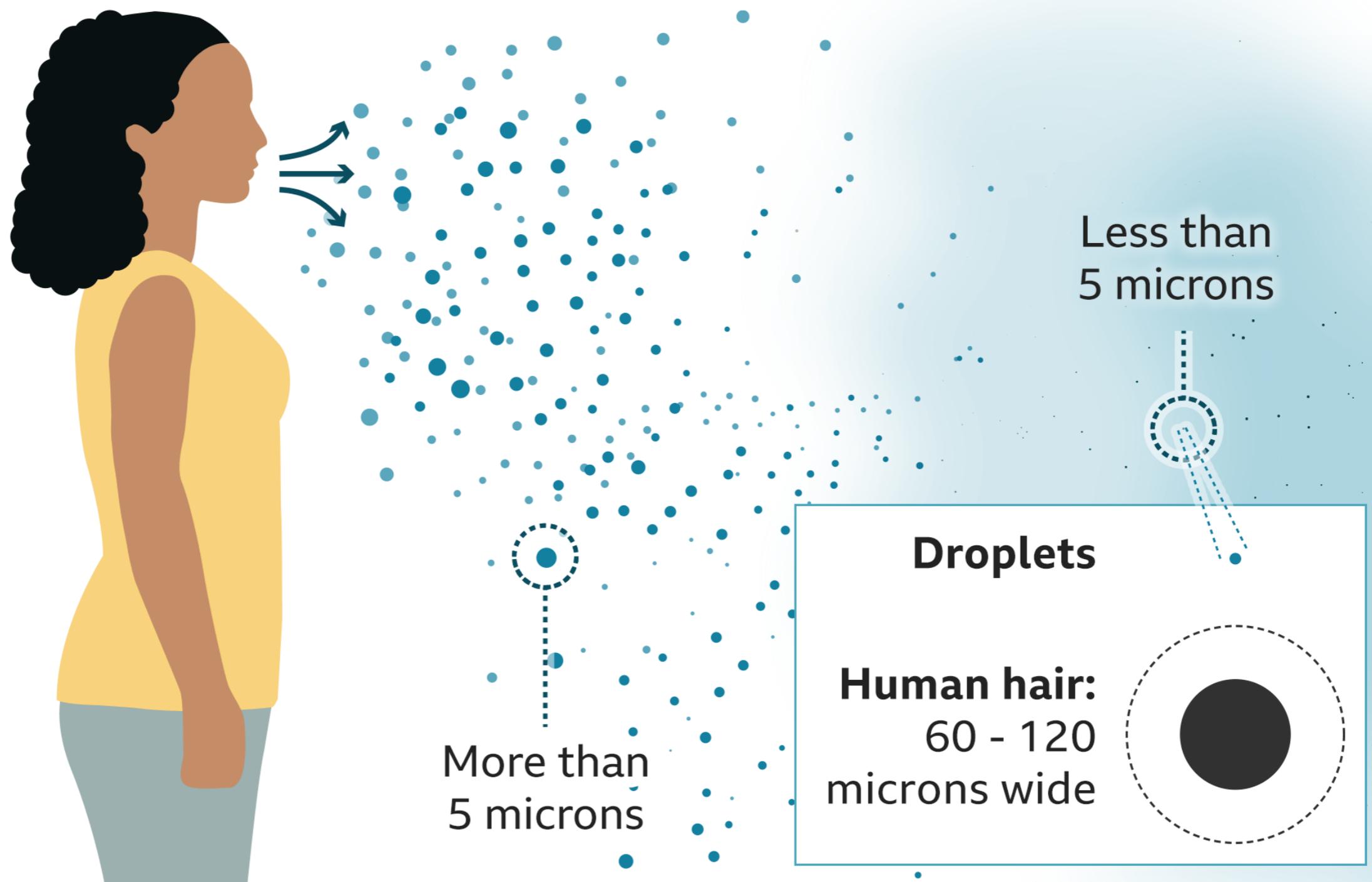
Mucus strands form cross links, a sticky, elastic gel

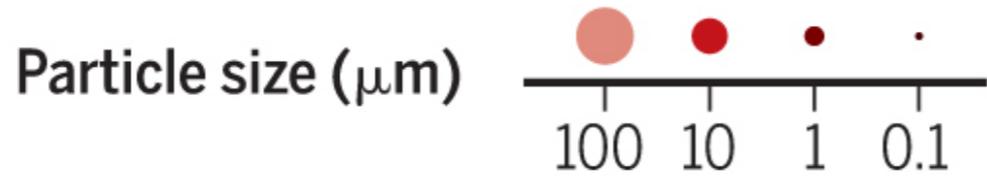
## Droplet transmission

Coughs and sneezes can spread droplets of saliva and mucus

## Airborne transmission

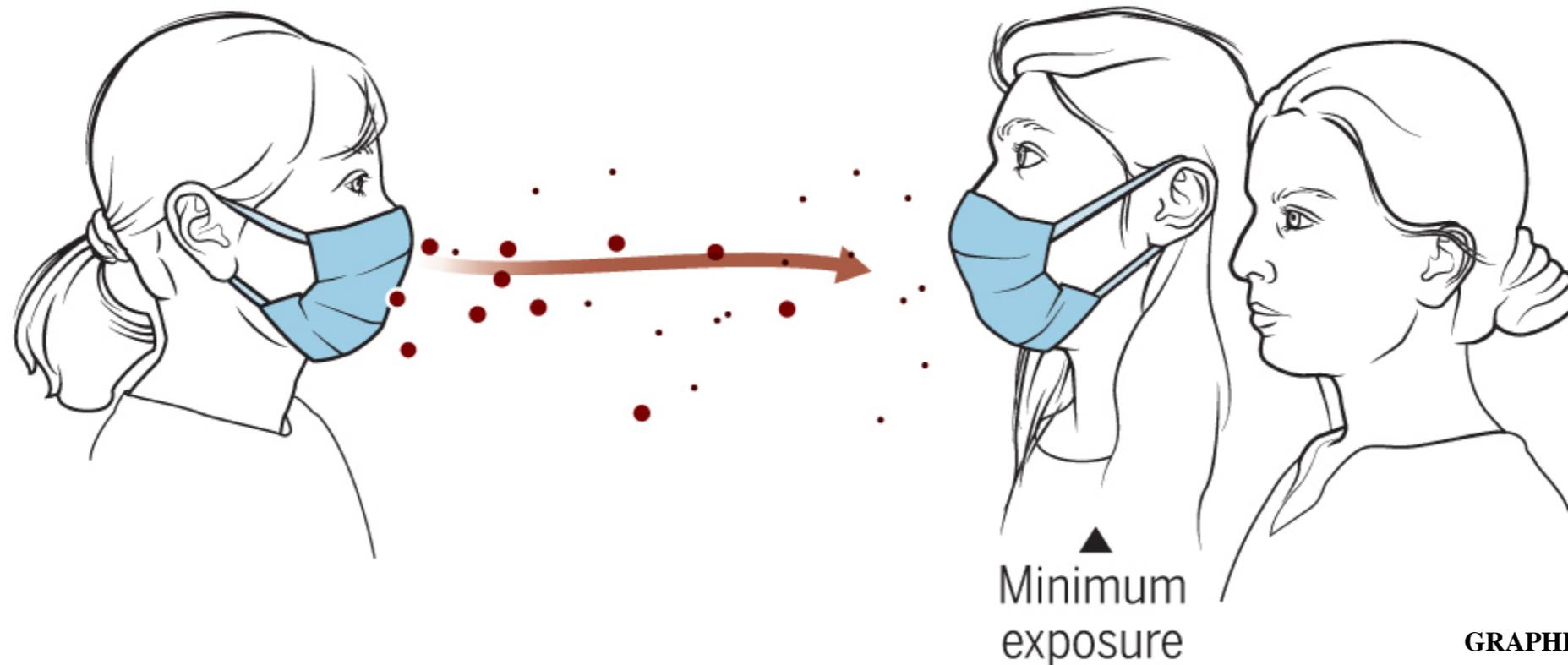
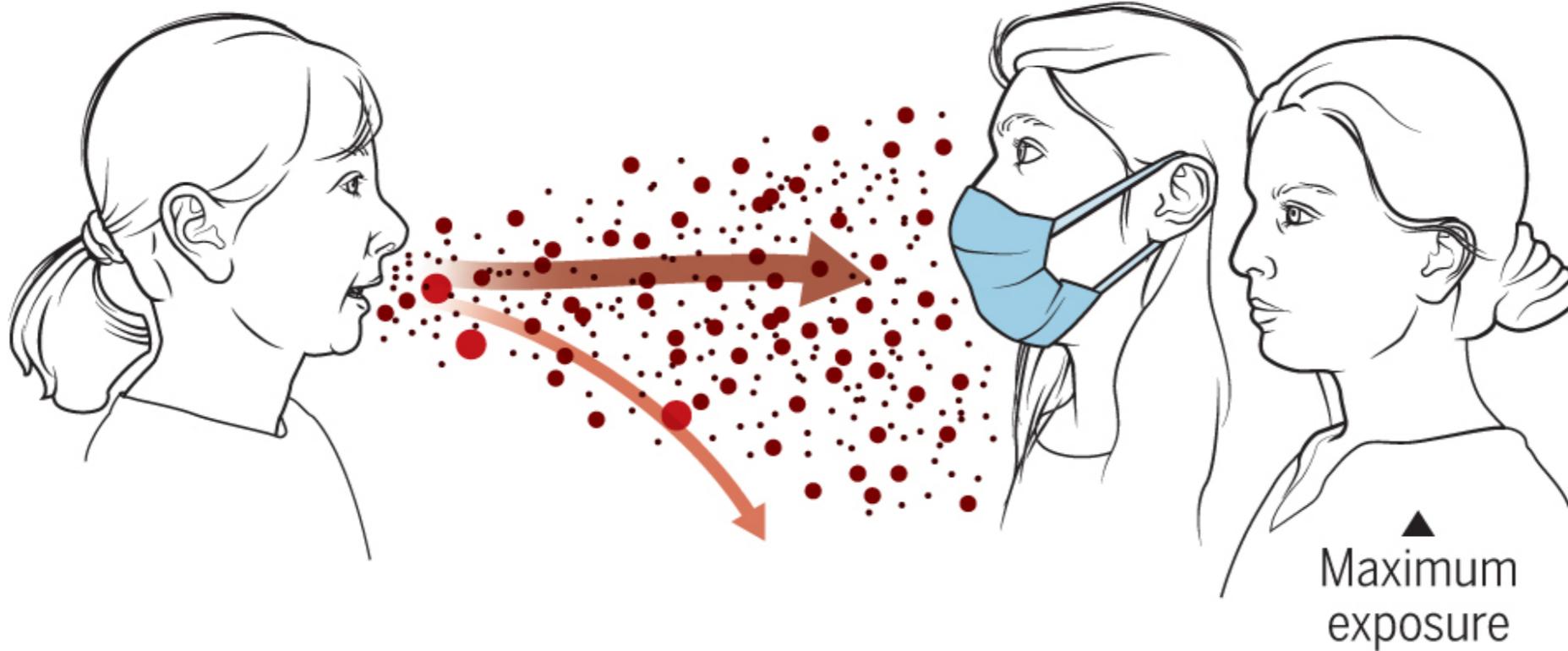
Tiny particles, possibly produced by talking, are suspended in the air for longer and travel further

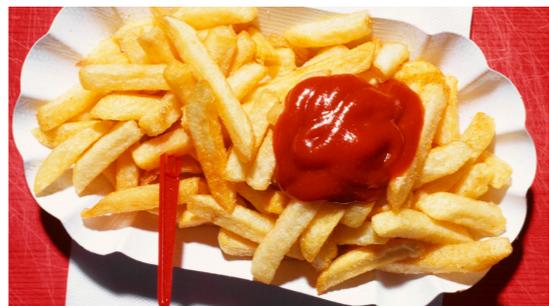




**Infected, asymptomatic**

**Healthy**





Soft and squishy materials are all  
around us

Spare a moment to think of how  
remarkable they are

Thank you