

Sex During Pregnancy

These days, people can and do talk about sex more easily than ever before. Nevertheless, when it comes to the subject of sex during pregnancy, a little of the old stand-offishness seems to persist. Women are often reluctant to bring up the question with their obstetricians. Worse, both husbands and wives frequently keep their innermost fears and feelings to themselves.

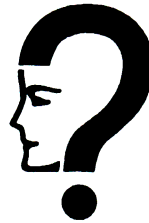
Particularly if this is your first child, your pregnancy will probably be a time of erratic mood swings...for you *and* your husband too. *You* may alternately feel fatigued...exhilarated, content...depressed, eager...fearful, motherly and beautiful...uncomfortable and unattractive. *He* on the other hand may range from feeling proud at having fathered a child, to anxious about the new financial responsibilities, from protective toward you and the growing fetus, to jealous of your new preoccupation.

All these mood changes will in turn have their changing

effect on your attitudes toward each other...and on your desire for sex. The most important thing is not what you feel, nor how silly you think it is, but that you share those feelings with each other. In this way you can make necessary adjustments and accommodations for a sexual relationship that continues to be as fulfilling as possible for both of you.

Following are some answers to questions about sex that commonly trouble expectant couples. If, after you and your husband have read it, you have further questions...or if at any time during your pregnancy you encounter a sexual problem or conflict that you cannot resolve yourselves...do not hesitate to ask your doctor. Be assured that nothing you can say will shock him. No matter how bizarre you may think the discussion, other people have probably had the same problem. And as he counseled them, so can he counsel you...sympathetically and knowledgeably.

Questions that Trouble Pregnant Women



1. Will my desire for sex decrease during my pregnancy?

No two women react exactly the same way to pregnancy. In most women, pregnancy has no significant effect on their interest in sex. In those women for whom contraception was an interruption or psychological obstacle, pregnancy may be a period of carefree and uninhibited sexual indulgence. At certain times, some women may feel they are "losing their figure and looks" during pregnancy. They may shy away from love-making, feeling undesirable. Or they may desire sex more often than usual as reassurance that their husbands still love them and find them attractive.

Occasionally, there will be a woman who feels an absolute distaste for intercourse throughout the course of her pregnancy. It is thought that this may be related to a conscious or unconscious fear of hurting the fetus, for it usually disappears as the baby is born.

2. Can vigorous intercourse harm the baby?

It is virtually impossible to harm the fetus in the uterus. The fluid it floats in, the membranes which contain it, the womb itself, the abdominal wall, and the bony pelvis all serve to protect the new life from injury.

3. Is it harmful to have orgasm during pregnancy?

Not at all. Orgasm is just as beneficial then as at any other time. And your having an orgasm will make no difference to the baby.

4. How often is it safe to have intercourse during pregnancy?

There is no ideal frequency and any frequency is safe. Frequency varies remarkably from couple to couple, and from month to month with the same couple. Some women are dis-

interested during the first three months of pregnancy, partly due to the fatigue that may accompany this period. But they tend to regain their energy in the fourth month and will often experience a new surge of sexual feeling.

5. Can I have intercourse any time during pregnancy?

Generally sexual intercourse is permitted throughout pregnancy until the last few weeks, when—some doctors feel—it might possibly cause premature rupture of the membranes. However, many doctors do not agree with this precaution, and you would do best to follow your own physician's instructions.

Intercourse *should* be curtailed and your doctor consulted if: 1) your "bag of waters" has broken; 2) you have vaginal bleeding, or itching and discharge; 3) you feel pain in the vagina or abdomen.

6. I have a history of miscarriages. Must I abstain from intercourse?

It is customary to abstain for the first three months of your pregnancy. Your doctor will probably tell you also not to take bumpy car rides or indulge in strenuous physical activity. This is to give the placenta a chance to develop sufficiently so that trauma to the uterus will not bring on bleeding or cramps.

7. I don't have pain. But the pressure during intercourse causes me great discomfort.

If it is simply your husband's weight that is causing you discomfort, this can be remedied by changing position. For instance, he may kneel astride you, or approach you from the side or back, or you may sit astride him.

If you feel internal pressure, it is wise to avoid deep penetration. Changing position or using pillows under you to change the angle of entry into the vagina may help. Also, additional lubrication with cream or jelly made for this purpose may relieve any vaginal discomfort.

8. It is very difficult to talk to my husband about the way I feel. I think I look ugly and undesirable. He never tells me otherwise and he doesn't cuddle me anymore.

Occasionally, a few men are physically "turned off" during their wife's pregnancy. It is only temporary and it shouldn't be viewed as a rejection. On the other hand, your husband's seeming neglect probably has nothing to do with your looks, since the majority of men find their wives most beautiful during this time. He may have inner anxieties and mixed feelings about his coming fatherhood that make him seem different. Or you may be unconsciously so involved with your "inner" life, that you are perhaps somewhat neglectful of him. Possibly your husband and you just need to talk things out more.

9. Is it permissible to douche during pregnancy?

This is another subject of some disagreement, so you'd best consult your own doctor. When permitted, you should use a douche bag or can (not a bulb syringe) and keep the water source lower than two feet to minimize the force of the water flow. With the nozzle inserted no more than a couple of inches into the vagina, allow the water to run in and out freely. Remember that douching is a matter of preference, and is not considered absolutely necessary for proper vaginal hygiene.

Questions that Trouble Expectant Fathers



1. I have a strong need for sex, but since her pregnancy, my wife isn't interested. It is causing tension between us. What can we do?

As with other marital disagreements, some form of loving compromise is probably the healthiest solution. See if you can talk it out with your wife, and perhaps settle on some lesser frequency or alternate method for you that requires less complete participation on her part.

Remember, too, that it is sometimes hard for a woman to feel interested in sex when she herself doesn't feel desirable. Frequent reassurance from you that she is still beautiful and loved despite her bulging belly may also help matters.

2. When I feel the baby moving in my wife's belly while we're making love, it puts an end to my sexual interest.

No doubt you are unconsciously worried that you might hurt the baby. You won't. As discussed above, the fetus is well protected. And its kickings and turnings have nothing to do with your sexual activity. However, if you are still bothered by this, try another position so you don't feel the baby.

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