



Supporting the birth that is right for you!

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## Sexuality and Pregnancy

*By Rebecca Pugh*

During pregnancy you may feel that everything is all about your vagina! And now your partner wants to have sex! Ugh! This handout is a guide to enjoying sexual activity while you are pregnant and a resource for ideas about making the most of your situation.

- **Kegel Exercises** - Sex is a great time to practice kegel exercises, or a tightening and relaxing of the pelvic floor/perineal muscles. Do this while having intercourse or during digital stimulation, this way your partner can confirm your ability to tighten and relax. These are crucial movements for relaxation during birth and for toning the area to promote healthy stretching and recovery from potential tears.
- **Preparing the vagina for birth** - Intercourse is an excellent way to prepare the birth canal for birth. The movements tone and loosen the pelvis, the vaginal muscles, and the uterus. Orgasms stimulate the production of hormones called prostaglandins and oxytocins that help prepare the body for birth. Orgasms can even bring on labor if the body is ready to give birth. But don't worry; having an orgasm will not induce premature labor. Sexual activity brings with it sexual awareness. Inspecting your vagina and learning what it can and can't do are part of that awareness. Labor and making love are very similar. Both involve being swept away by emotion and sensation, letting go, and honoring the body. Let making love be a role model for your birth. The energy that brought the baby in is the energy that brings the baby out!
- **Not now honey!** - It is normal to have a lack of sexual desire during some stages of pregnancy. Early in pregnancy, nausea and vomiting can make a woman feel like she just wants to be alone. That is o.k. Later in pregnancy the size of your belly and your excess weight gain may make you feel awkward and uncomfortable. It may seem that no position is conducive to making love. You will both have to get creative with finding positions that work around your growing belly and are comfortable and pleasurable for both of you. Her breasts may become so sensitive that they hurt when stimulated or her cervix may be tender. Sex should be comfortable and painless, if it isn't seek guidance or give it a rest.
- **Parents Worry** - One big concern is possibly hurting the baby. Dads especially worry about hurting mother or baby. The baby is insulated well inside the uterus and further inside the amniotic sac, which acts as a shock absorber and cushion for the baby. This will make intercourse safe. You may experience contractions while making love or soon after. Don't worry, just rest and relax. If they begin to form a consistent pattern or do not stop after an hour, call your midwife. Nipple stimulation will also increase hormone production that may bring on Braxton-Hicks contractions. These hormonal changes will soften and ripen the cervix, which is excellent preparation for labor. Again, don't worry; these changes should not induce premature labor.
- **Emotional Roller coaster** - Your partner may not see you as sexually desirable if he becomes fixated on your image as mother, not lover. Talk this over and see if you can find ways to bring back the passion. As a pregnant woman your hormones are raging...one minute you may be ravenous for sex, the next you may be focused on the baby and be annoyed by your partners advances. Be patient with one another!
- **A Word of Warning** - Please don't make love if your water has broken or you have lost your mucous plug, in order to prevent infection. Also, do not make love if your midwife has asked you not to, for example if you are trying to hold off labor.