

Sexual Health After Birth

After childbirth, you may have questions or concerns about your sexual health. Each person experiences their sexual health differently. Issues such as body image, fatigue, stress, hormones, new responsibilities as a parent, relationships, the birthing experience, previous trauma, or mental health can affect your sexual health after childbirth.



Feeling 'Ready' for Sex

- There is no 'right' or 'wrong' time to feel ready. You know yourself and your body best. You may not feel physically or emotionally ready to resume sexual activity after birth and that is okay.
- Some people find it helpful to communicate their needs, thoughts, or feelings to their sexual partner(s), explore how their body feels when touched through self-exploration or masturbation, and talk to others about their experiences. Dilators may help you explore your body without worrying about pain.
- Your doctor, nurse practitioner, or midwife may discuss sexual health at your postpartum check-up. It is okay if you do not feel ready for sex by six weeks postpartum. It is also okay if you do feel ready before six weeks.
- Lower desire for sex is common after birth. How you are intimate with your partner(s) may change and can include cuddling, flirting, cooking together, spending time alone with your partner(s), complimenting each other, or kissing.
- Many postpartum people believe that their body has changed a lot after pregnancy and birth, not only in terms of how it looks but also how it works. It may take time to feel like your body is 'yours' again or you may choose to define your body (or certain body parts) in different ways.
- It is never okay for other people to pressure you to have sex.



Sexual Health and Nursing Your Baby

- When your body is making milk, your hormones can cause vaginal dryness and might make sex uncomfortable. Talk to your doctor or nurse practitioner if this is a problem for you and they may be able to prescribe vaginal estrogen cream to help with your symptoms. Also, using a water-based or silicone-based lubricant can help to make sexual activity more comfortable (and is also safe to use with a condom).
- It is important to use contraceptive methods that are safe for people who are nursing (condoms, contraceptive implant, or certain birth control pills) if you do not want to become pregnant.
- Some people might feel 'turned on' while nursing their child. If you experience this, it is nothing to feel ashamed or embarrassed about. You may also experience leaking milk (called the milk ejection reflex) when you are sexually aroused or climaxing.
- Your breasts or chest area, especially your nipples, will likely feel sensitive and tender to touch.



Resources

- You might find that pelvic floor physiotherapy can help your physical healing, especially if you have experienced perineal tearing (tearing near the vagina that can happen during childbirth).
- If you have concerns about your sexual health, talk to your doctor, midwife, or nurse/nurse practitioner.

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This information is based on a recent research study titled "Exploring Postpartum Sexual Health in Nova Scotia Using Feminist Poststructuralism" (March 2022)