



## Breastfeeding and Sexuality

It really shouldn't be surprising that the experience of childbirth, a significant amount of sleep deprivation, and a radically new family structure can create some very strong shock waves in a couple's relationship. Many parents are startled by the swings in their feelings about each other and their desire for sexual contact. Complicating things more is the fact that each parent's experiences differ in such important ways at first—with mothers in almost constant physical contact with their babies while partners look on, desiring more closeness. At the end of the day, a new mother may have had so much "touching" that sex is the last thing on her mind, while the non-breastfeeding partner may feel especially in need of some physical sign of her affection.



This is not always the case, of course. Some breastfeeding mothers (and their partners) experience less sexual desire during certain phases of parenthood, while others experience more.

If you and your partner find that the intimacy of the breastfeeding period enhances your sexual life, or if you feel freed by the natural birth control benefits of exclusive breastfeeding during the first six months, take full advantage of it.

If, on the other hand, your desires conflict, try to remember that this stage will pass, and focus on keeping the lines of communication open in the meantime. Remember that intimacy is not equated with having sexual intercourse; rather, it's important that you and your partner feel a closeness and bond with each other. Kisses, an occasional nuzzle, or a back rub may convey these feelings better than more intense physical contact. Sincere compliments can mean a lot to a new mother, who may feel less "put together" than she's used to and may feel a little self-conscious about her postpartum shape.

While couples may feel that their sexual life has changed with the birth of the baby, studies have shown that most couples resume intercourse at about seven weeks postpartum, though breastfeeding couples' sexual activity tends to resume more gradually than that of bottle-feeding couples throughout the first year. By taking into account this typical pattern of sexual activity and understanding that it's a normal part of the transition from pregnancy to life as a family, you may be able to relax enough during this temporary glitch in your sex life to enjoy the wonderful changes that are happening in your family.

## Your feelings about breastfeeding

In a recent study, pregnant women were asked to predict what their partners' attitudes toward breastfeeding would be. Surprisingly, their responses were highly inaccurate (hardly better than random guessing). Most believed that their partners were far more negative about breastfeeding than they actually were.

For this reason, it's important to share your feelings about breastfeeding and new parenthood with your partner whenever possible. Such conversations can help preserve the intimacy of your relationship during the physically challenging early months, while also supporting your partner in her breastfeeding efforts at a time when every encouraging word helps.

If you love the sight of her breastfeeding your baby, tell her how it makes you feel. If you consider her nursing mother's figure just as sexy, let her know. Share with her your pride in her commitment to breastfeeding as she breastfeeds in public and makes herself available to satisfy your child's hunger at all times.

Such words of support and affirmation can act as a highly effective aphrodisiac for many new mothers (if not now, then later) and may improve your relationship even as they ensure your child's continued good health.

**Last Updated** 11/2/2009

**Source** New Mother's Guide to Breastfeeding, 2nd Edition (Copyright © 2011 American Academy of Pediatrics)

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