

~ Anal massage, by itself or along with perineal massage is a very healthy, safe practice. The perineum, located between the vaginal opening and the anus, is where most of the stretch of vaginal delivery will occur, and moisturizing and massaging these areas allow you to prepare for the labor process, and recuperate afterwards. Remember to keep anal secretions from being transferred into the vaginal canal, because some can cause dangerous infections in the uterus.

~ Remember that safer sex counts during pregnancy. Many of the easily contracted infections (syphilis, herpes, chlamydia, HIV, gonorrhea) are very dangerous and possibly life-threatening to the baby. Pregnancy can offer a welcome break from the use of contraceptives, but don't forget about protecting yourself and your pregnancy from infections. If you've been intimate without barrier protection with an un-tested partner, ask your health provider to test you and your partner for these infections.

Are sex toys okay to use during pregnancy?

Most sex toys are fine to use during pregnancy. Ideally, a toy used during pregnancy should be made from non-porous, easy-to-clean materials recommended for those with chemical sensitivities. Safe materials include silicone, lucite, glass, stainless steel, or hard-shell plastic. If your toy is made of a substance that does not fit this description, such as jelly or Cyberskin, we suggest that you cover it with a latex or polyurethane condom before using.

Sexual lubricants designed for penetration are also safe for use during pregnancy. If you have any special concerns about specific chemical influences with the pregnancy, read your product labels. You may choose to switch to one with fewer ingredients (like *Slippery Stuff*), or organic production methods (such as *Sliquid Organics*).

Yeast infections are more common during pregnancy, so it's a good idea to avoid lubricants that contain glycerin (see our *Personal Lubricants* brochure to learn more).

Vibrators are safe to use on the vulva during pregnancy. An orgasm is an orgasm. It is a myth that orgasms from masturbation and vibrators are too strong and can harm a fetus. Not true. Play away! You are toning your pelvic floor, and helping yourself get a good night's sleep without medication.

Can pregnancy affect sexual desire?

You bet. Remember, your body is experiencing lots of hormonal changes, as well as shape changes. Your life is also in transition. All of these things can affect sexual desire. Some women find that their sexual desire increases. Other women find that their interest in sex wanes. Be kind to yourself and don't judge yourself for these peaks and dips in desire. Likewise, be understanding of your partner. If she or he has needs that you feel you cannot meet at this point in your pregnancy, be accepting of their use of masturbation, sex toys, erotic literature, magazines or videos. It may even be fun and helpful for you to enjoy some of these things with your partner. You never know what might put you in the mood.

Just like at other stages in your life, maintaining a satisfying sex life can take some effort. You may wish to plan times to be sexual with yourself or a partner, bring a sense of play to sex with games and toys, experiment with different positions and techniques, or find non-genital ways to connect intimately, such as massage, cuddling or kissing.

Sometimes attempting to be sexual is a good way to put yourself in the mood. Start with your body and your head may very well follow. As midwife Elizabeth Davis says, "The more you have sex, the more you want to have sex." And don't be afraid to have fun. You may feel inundated with solemn advice about the baby and people treating you like a fragile princess—all the more reason to incorporate fun, naughtiness, and laughter into your sex play.

Resource List:

AWT's *Pelvic Floor Health* brochure

~ *Your Orgasmic Pregnancy* by Cavallucci and Fulbright
An thorough and fun book about keeping your sex life sizzling during pregnancy.

~ *Hot Mamas: How to have a babe and be a babe*, by Karen Salmansohn with illustrations by Trisha Krauss
This small book is lots of fun and packed with great tips for how to feel your best and continue to connect with your partner throughout, and after, pregnancy.

~ *Nina Hartley's Guide to Great Sex During Pregnancy (DVD)*
An explicit erotic movie that gives you tips plus sexy demonstration for enjoying sex during pregnancy.

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Pregnancy & Sex

Answers to common questions
about sexuality, sexual practices,
and safety during pregnancy



A Woman's Touch
Sexuality Resource Center

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Dear Dr. Myrtle,

I have a WHOLE bunch of questions about being sexual while I'm pregnant. Can you give me some detailed information about how to enjoy sex during pregnancy?

During pregnancy, your body and your personal roles may shift dramatically. These changes can transform your view of yourself as a sexual person. You may feel newly grounded in your body, and revel in your creative sensuality. Your breasts may become larger, your genitals more lubricated and engorged with blood, leading you to feel more in touch with your sexuality than you ever have before.

Yet, you may also feel as though you're developing a brand new and sometimes awkward body. Many women struggle with a negative body image as they gain the weight that's necessary and healthy for pregnancy. People in your life and even total strangers may begin to see you as a mother and ignore your sexual self. You *yourself* may feel less sexual than you did before you became pregnant.

Sexuality during pregnancy has important benefits:

- ~ Being sexually intimate and aroused is a great way to connect to your sexual side, to celebrate yourself as a beautiful sexual creature, or to remind yourself of that fact.
- ~ Sex may lessen some of the aches and pains that accompany pregnancy and can even help you to sleep.
- ~ Orgasms can tone and strengthen your pelvic floor muscles, which help you carry the pregnancy comfortably, help assist with a vaginal delivery, and help speed up recovery after delivery.
- ~ If you have a partner, sex can help you feel close, have fun and play together, relieve tension, and celebrate your relationship before the changes that come with parenthood.
- ~ For the baby, some even say that the rocking motions of intercourse, if you choose to have it, can soothe and relax her or him.

Will sex hurt the baby?

Pregnant women and their partners worry that sex, especially penile-vaginal penetration, will somehow harm the pregnancy. This is not the case. Your body was beautifully designed to protect and cushion your pregnancy. Your baby is additionally protected inside your uterus by a surrounding pillow of amniotic fluid.

The vulva and vaginal canal are perfectly capable of responding to sexual arousal, with no danger to the pregnancy. Far inside of the vagina lies the cervix, a strong, muscular, donut-shaped structure that helps hold the pregnancy in place. Since the cervix is softer during pregnancy, any sexual practices that could cut, tear, or bruise the cervix should be avoided. For most women, penile-vaginal penetration is gentle to the cervix. If you use firm/hard toys, avoid deep, hard thrusting that can harm the cervix. Also, nothing will get lost inside of you: until the very end of pregnancy, the cervical opening will develop a small mucous plug, and remain much too small for anything like a penis, fingers, or a dildo to pass through.

If you have a history of miscarriage, your health care provider may ask you to avoid vaginal penetration and/or orgasm, especially during the first trimester. There is no medical evidence that these activities cause miscarriage or that abstaining will prevent miscarriage, but it's fine to wait until after the birth if it will help you to feel less stressed. Your midwife or doctor may also ask you to abstain from sex if your pregnancy is considered "high-risk" for other reasons. If you experience pain, bleeding, cramping, spotting, or notice any unusual discharge, call your healthcare provider, and ask for more guidance.

What if my healthcare provider says "no sex"?

Make sure that you know what is meant by "sex." What about oral sex? Anal sex? Are you to avoid penetration or is orgasm prohibited altogether? Find out why she or he has placed restrictions on "sex" and make sure you are clear about what is being recommended to you and why. Ask about any sexual practices you enjoy which your healthcare provider has not specifically addressed. If your provider is uncomfortable or unable to answer your questions, find other sources of information—this is your body and your pleasure.

Is it OK to have sex when I'm due to deliver?

Sex can actually benefit the birthing process. When a baby is overdue, sex can be useful to bring on labor. Orgasm and nipple stimulation can help induce contractions and stimulate labors that have slowed or stopped. Some people worry that these techniques can bring on premature labor, but remember that if everything is going along as it should, labor generally doesn't start before it is supposed

to. If your partner is male, the prostaglandins in his semen can also help to ripen the cervix, which is a good thing.

While in labor, dancing, kissing, cuddling, and being caressed and massaged by your partner (although it is unlikely that you will want to do these things throughout your entire labor) are great ways to feel connected and supported. Rocking your hips and making low moaning noises, like those motions and noises you make during sex, can re-start stalled labors, make you feel focused and uninhibited, and help the baby descend into the birth canal and settle into optimal birthing positions. As midwife Ina Mae Gaskin says, "The energy that gets the baby in gets the baby out." Some women even have spontaneous orgasms during childbirth. (For further discussion, you may wish to consult the book *Spiritual Midwifery* by Ina Mae Gaskin.) We acknowledge that this isn't every woman's experience or ideal, and we don't suggest that you focus on achieving orgasm during delivery. However, we do think that it is helpful to present this rarely offered perspective on childbirth: it can be a safe, sensual, satisfying experience.

What about other kinds of sex play?

- ~ Oral sex is fine during pregnancy. Some women find that the increased engorgement of their vulva intensifies the warmth and sensation of oral play. However, don't have your partner blow air into your vagina, as it could push normal bacteria up into the uterus (where it doesn't belong), or force harmful air bubbles ("air embolism") to travel into your bloodstream. These little bubbles can be dangerous for both you and your pregnancy.
- ~ Trim fingernails or don a nitrile or latex glove to prevent cutting the cervix, or dislodging the cervical plug.
- ~ Be careful not to transfer secretions from the anus to the vagina. Use a condom (over a toy or penis) or glove during anal play, and then remove it before moving on to some other activity.

~ For those women who enjoyed anal penetration before they were pregnant, anal penetration is often most comfortable during the first trimester of pregnancy. After that time, the increased blood engorgement of the anal area can cause veins to bulge out, and can result in hemorrhoids. The hemorrhoids themselves can make anal penetration uncomfortable. Not everyone gets hemorrhoids during pregnancy, so do what feels right for your body.