

SOME CONSIDERATIONS FOR POSTPARTUM SEX

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Resuming sexual relations is an important part of returning to a normal lifestyle and reestablishing closeness with your partner following childbirth. As with other activities in the postpartum period, however, you must be prepared to ease back into sex slowly and be patient while your body heals.

Most couples can begin to have intercourse when all pelvic structures, including the episiotomy, have healed, the menstrual-like (or bloody) discharge has stopped, and the woman feels comfortable - usually in about three to four weeks. Try not to get discouraged if at first intercourse is painful. To minimize discomfort, you might try experimenting with different positions or finding other means of mutual sexual enjoyment. Lubricating jelly can help relieve vaginal dryness caused by lowered postpartum hormone levels.

It is important at this time to decide upon an appropriate form of birth control. Some women mistakenly believe that until their period resumes (usually in six to eight weeks), pregnancy is impossible, remember, ovulation occurs two weeks before menstruation, sometimes soon after delivery.

Although breast-feeding usually delays the return of menstrual periods for several months, some nursing women begin menstruating much earlier. Therefore, it is not safe to rely on breast-feeding for contraception.

When choosing a postpartum contraceptive, you may find that the method you used before does not suit your needs now. It is wise to discuss family planning and birth control issues with your doctor before making a decision.

Non-nursing women who choose oral contraceptives can begin taking them about three weeks after delivery. Nursing women can start once their milk flow is well established. Although the pill is the most effective and most popular form of reversible birth control, it may not be recommended for some women, so you should discuss risks and benefits with your doctor.

Barrier methods of contraception, such as the diaphragm, cervical cap, and condom are better choices for some women. Women who go back to using a diaphragm after birth should have it refitted after giving birth.

Couples who feel that their family units are complete often choose sterilization – either tubal ligation for the woman or vasectomy for the man.

Sex takes energy and time, both of which may be limited with a new baby around. But with love and patience your sex life should be as satisfying as ever.

Single free copies of "Contraception" (AP005) are available by sending a stamped, self-addressed, business size envelope, along with the name of the booklet to: The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, Resource Center, 409 12th Street, SW, Washington, DC 20024