

Sexual health after childbirth

After childbirth, you may have questions or concerns about your sexual health.

Each person experiences their sexual health differently. Following childbirth, your sexual health may be affected by; body image, fatigue, stress, hormones, new responsibilities as a parent, relationships, the birthing experience, previous trauma, or mental health.



Feeling 'ready' for sex

- There is no 'right' or 'wrong' time to feel ready. You know your body and feelings best. You may not feel ready to resume sexual activity after childbirth. If you do not feel physically or emotionally ready yet, that is okay.
- Some people find it helpful to communicate their needs and feelings to their sexual partner(s). Some find talking to others about their sexual health helpful. Some find self-exploration or masturbation helpful for learning their body's responses to touch. (For example, dilators may help you explore your body without worrying about pain.)
- Your health care provider may discuss sexual health at your postpartum check-up. It is okay if you do not feel ready for sex by six weeks postpartum.
- Lower desire for sex is common after childbirth. How you define being intimate with your partner(s) may change. It could mean instead of having sex, you try: cuddling, flirting, cooking together, spending time alone with your partner(s), complimenting each other, or kissing.
- After pregnancy and childbirth, your postpartum body may change. It may look and work differently. It may take time to feel like your body is 'yours' again. You may choose to define your body (or certain body parts) in other ways.
- It is never okay for other people to pressure you to have sex.



Sexual health and breastfeeding or chestfeeding your baby

- When your body is making milk, your hormones can cause vaginal dryness. This might make sex uncomfortable. Using a water or silicone based lubricant can help. Lubricant can make sexual activity more comfortable (it is safe to use with a condom). Discuss any concerns with your health care provider. They may prescribe vaginal estrogen cream for your symptoms. Vaginal estrogen is safe with lactation.
- Your breasts (especially nipples) or chest area may be tender to touch. They are likely to feel sensitive.
- Some people may feel sexually aroused while breastfeeding or chestfeeding their baby. If you experience this, it is a normal response related to the release of feel-good hormones when nursing. You may also leak milk (called the milk ejection reflex) when you are sexually aroused or climaxing.
- It is important to consider birth control methods that are safe and effective for people who are breastfeeding or chestfeeding (condoms, contraceptive implant, IUD, or certain birth control pills).



Resources

- Pelvic floor physiotherapy may help your physical healing. It can be very helpful if you have experienced perineal tearing (tearing near the vagina during childbirth).
Find a Pelvic Floor Physio at www.bcphysio.org
Click the "Find a Physio" link, then select any / all:
 - Incontinence
 - Women's health
 - Pelvic floor
- Concerns about your sexual health? Discuss with your health care provider.
- Websites:
 - www.itsaplan.ca
 - www.sexandu.ca
 - www.lllc.ca/sex-hormones-and-breastfeeding
 - www.bepelvichealthaware.ca
 - www.optionsforsexualhealth.org