

my body

sex during pregnancy

Sex, intimacy, and orgasms

We know that not everyone experiences sex, intimacy, or orgasms in the same way. Nor do they use the same words to talk about them. To make this handout easier to read, we will use the general word “sex.” Your midwives are also available to talk about any questions or concerns you have about sex.



Is sex safe during pregnancy?

Yes! Your baby is well protected by your body. Unless you or your partner(s) have one of the issues below, you can enjoy oral, vaginal, anal, and manual (with hands) stimulation.

When is sex unsafe?

Do not have sex if you are:

- Leaking amniotic fluid.
- Experiencing preterm labor.
- Having vaginal bleeding heavier than spotting.
- Diagnosed with placenta previa (placenta that covers all or part of your cervical opening).
- Diagnosed with a sexually transmitted infection (STI) that has not been treated.
- With a partner who has a visible herpes lesion (also called a cold sore) on their mouth or genitals.
- Your midwife has talked with you about a medical condition that could make sex unsafe.

It is important to test for sexually transmitted infections during your pregnancy, especially because many people with STIs do not have symptoms. If you have sex with a new partner(s) during your pregnancy, make sure that you are both tested for STIs again. Use a condom or dental dam until both of your tests come back negative.

Your changing body and sexual desire

Your mind and body will go through many changes during pregnancy. As blood flow increases to your pelvic region and chest, sensations might feel stronger. For some, this makes things more pleasurable, and for others it is too much. It is also likely that your desire for sex will change. Some people desire sex more, while others are less interested or not interested at all. This can change at different points in the pregnancy. **All of these feelings are normal.** Talking to your sexual partner(s) about how you are feeling can help. You can also talk with your midwife if you feel concerned or need support.

Benefits of sex and orgasms

If sex is something you are interested in, there are a number of benefits.

- It helps to keep you bonded with your partner(s).
- It is exercise!
- The hormones released during orgasm can help you relax and sleep.
- Those same hormones can also help with aches and pains associated with pregnancy.
- When the time is right and your body is ready, it could help to get labor going.
- It can strengthen your pelvic floor muscles, which can help with recovery after birth.

Comfort and safety

Vaginal sex

Vaginal sex (penis, fingers, or vibrator into the vagina) can be made more comfortable by doing the following:

- Use a lubricant.
- Try different positions that do not put weight on your belly.
- Communicate with your partner(s). If something doesn't feel right or hurts, say so and either change positions, try more lubricant, or stop.

Oral and anal sex

- Receiving oral sex during pregnancy is safe as long as your partner does not have any active herpes sores around their mouth.
- Make sure that if you move from anal sex to vaginal sex, that the body part or toy being used is washed before it goes into the vagina or near your urethra (where you pee).
- If you have hemorrhoids, anal sex can cause discomfort and bleeding.

Sex toys and vibrators

- Make sure that sex toys and vibrators are clean before use. You can clean them with soap and water.
- For toys made of plastic or silicone, it is better to use a water-based lubricant instead of a silicone-based one.
- If you share sex toys or vibrators with your sexual partner(s), it is important to clean them between each use to help decrease passing bacteria from one person to the other.

Lubricants

- Some people experience vaginal dryness during pregnancy. A lubricant can help make sex more comfortable. There are three main types of lubricants: water-based, oil-based, and silicone-based.
- Water and silicone based lubricants are safe to use with condoms; oil-based lubricants should be avoided with condoms.
- Again, water-based lubricant is the best to use with silicone and plastic sex toys.
- Avoid warming, flavors, and glycerin which can cause irritation and infection for some people.

Sex and labor

Though sex can sometimes cause cramping or contractions, it does not cause people to go into labor too early. During the second and third trimester, having sex can cause your body to release a hormone called oxytocin, which also causes contractions during labor. Contractions from sex usually go away within an hour or so after sex. You might also notice a little bit of bleeding, which happens because of the many blood vessels in your cervix. During pregnancy, those vessels can bleed even when they are lightly touched. This bleeding comes from the cervix, not from inside the uterus, and does not harm your baby. It usually goes away within a day or two.

Some people have found that when they are close to their due date, their labor started soon after having sex. This only happens if your body is already ready for your labor to begin. We think this is because of oxytocin. Also, semen contains prostaglandins that can help soften and prepare your cervix for labor. If semen is present during sex, this could also be part of starting labor at the end of pregnancy. Though research studies aren't sure that sex close to your due date can induce labor, it is safe to try as long as you've had a healthy pregnancy (see the list at the beginning of this handout for reasons to avoid sex).

If you feel contractions that are getting stronger and not going away, or if you have bleeding that fills a pad or doesn't stop within a day or so, call your midwife right away.

Other forms of intimacy

If you are not interested in sex or you cannot have sex, there are many ways that you can maintain intimacy in your relationship like massage, cuddling, or just spending time together. Some people prefer not to have sex with others but still enjoy stimulating themselves using their fingers, a vibrator, or another sex toy. This is safe, healthy, and normal.

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