

At your 6 week postpartum visit you are all cleared for sex. Woo hoo!

At least that is what is typically told to mothers at their 6 week postpartum visit. While that may be true for some, it is not for everyone. Between taking care of baby, exhaustion, household chores, your own hormones and emotions and healing of your perineal area or cesarean scar, some women aren't ready for sexual intimacy until 6 months postpartum.

When it is the right time for sex, take it slow. Some women complain of pain or discomfort the first time. This can be a normal reaction but if it persists, a visit to your pelvic floor therapist is a must. Make sure you are properly lubricated either by your own natural lubrication or the help of a water based lubricant or coconut oil. Coconut oil should not be used with condoms as it can cause the condom to break. Try out different positions and allow yourself to continue with intercourse or stop if now just isn't the time.

Once you do resume sexual penetration, make sure to be prepared with family planning methods. You can ovulate before your period resumes. **Exclusively breastfeeding is not a reliable birth control method.** I'm sure you may have read that exclusively breastfeeding prevents ovulation for the first 6 months postpartum, this is not reliable information. Family planning methods can range from barrier methods such as condoms and diaphragms to tracking your signs and symptoms to prescription birth control. Some methods are more reliable than others and surprise pregnancies are possible with all but abstinence. Some hormonal contraceptives can negatively affect your milk supply. Review the "contraceptives" handout for further information.

Backing off from sex, there are many factors around intimacy postpartum. Oxford says intimacy is "close familiarity or friendship; closeness." Notice how sex is not anywhere in that definition, though sex is a form of intimacy that most couples include in their relationship regularly. Not connecting via sex for long periods may leave a relationship strained if there are not any other forms of intimacy utilized.

Another factor is how your relationship with your partner is currently fairing. Are you agitated with them for not helping with your baby or not being home enough? Do you fight a lot about how to raise your child(ren) or financial stress? Are they really helpful, you just don't feel beautiful and sexy? Does everything just feel dull and gray? Are you simply just touched out by baby and over-stimulated?

Do you make time for dates with or without baby, in home or outside of the home? Remember, dates do not have to be expensive or nights on the town. A meal spent together without distraction at home while baby sleeps opens up the ability to communicate and experience closeness. Other home ideas - dancing in the living room, playing a card or board game together, watching a t.v. series together, going on a walk together, etc. All can be done with baby or during sleep periods. If baby will take a bottle or you can leave for a few minutes between feeds you can plan dates around those times.

Another way to show intimacy is acknowledging each other. The small things really do add up. Thanking your partner when they do something for you, telling them that they look nice or smell good, long hugs, kisses before work, after work or throughout the day, a note left for them to find, buying their favorite treat, a loving text or silly meme are all ways to connect and keep your bond strong while in this new period of your relationship.

You may need couples therapy if you feel that your relationship is taking too much of a hit. There is no shame in seeking out professional help. We are constantly asking our trusted friends for their advice, why not a professional?