



Healthy
Pregnancy
SUMMIT



Ashley Zimmerman
PT, DPT, PMA-CPT

Sex During Pregnancy

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

pregnancy, pregnant, sex, pelvic floor, baby, birth, women, orgasm, squat, doctor, big, c section, feel, bit, muscles, bleeding, lengthen, vaginal sex, cervix, partner

00:00

Welcome to our session on sex during pregnancy. I'm Professor Adams and with me today is Dr. Ashley Zimmerman. She's a physical therapist holds a PhD in physical therapy, and she specializes in pelvic health. Thank you, Ashley for being here today.

00:17

Thank you so much for having me. Hi, everyone.

00:20

Ashley, this is very important topic for many people. Can you tell us a little bit about your background and your experience in advising women and couples on sex during pregnancy?

00:31

Yeah, so I specialize in treating pelvic health. And so oftentimes, what brings women to me is just the preparation of their pelvic floor for birth. And with that, of course, comes the topic of sex with pregnancy. Because with sex with pregnancy, you know, there's a lot of questions, especially first time moms, and we know that all pregnancies are different. And so even if this is your second or third baby What happens is totally individual to that specific child. So we have to talk about it all right, we have to talk about maybe certain positions that aren't comfortable this



time, but were last time and so you get kind of nervous and you think that something's going on. But really, it's just how your body is. And so that's honestly like one of my favorite things to do is comfort them because it can be scary, and we just want to, you know, everybody's just trying to make sure that baby is healthy. But we want to make sure that we are living our lives, you know, the way we want to as well.

01:36

Right, so I think the first question many people would have is, is it safe to have sex during pregnancy?

01:43

Yes, it is. Um, during all nine months or nine plus months, it is safe to have sex while you're pregnant. There are of course, some things that you want to watch for. And if we get into that a little bit now If you've had a history of miscarriage, your doctor might tell you that especially during that first trimester to kind of hold off, especially for like the first six, eight weeks. But this is super specific to your case. So my best recommendation for that was, is to be in discussion with your doctor, if you have any questions, because sometimes, if you had, you know, a couple miscarriages, there's really no problem with it. And sometimes they might want you to be a little bit more careful. But that's dependent on where you are. And so overall, yes, safe to have sex.

02:42

And then are there certain positions that may be safer for the baby.

02:47

So this again, is dependent on your comfort level, because we know that as baby grows, your belly gets bigger along with the baby and so some positions might just Not Be comfortable to get in, you hear a lot about risks of lying on your back while you're pregnant. And the big concern there is that if you're lying on your back for too long, it can cut off the blood flow to some major blood vessels. Now that can be true or it cannot be true, depending on how long you're lying on your back and how big the baby is, and all of that stuff. And so whatever position feels best, that's what you go for. If you found that because there's fatigue that it comes with pregnancy too. So you might find that lying on your side or standing. leaning over something is just a little bit more comfortable because you can get some more support, then then go for that but ultimately, there's no position that's for sure safer. It's just what you're comfortable with and what you feel good into. Because that's the other thing it's not about just doing it just to do it. You want to enjoy it as well. So if you're not enjoying it, and this is male and female, you both have to kind of work together. Because again, there's there's a, there's a baby in front of mom, right? So that can change that can change some things. And so you just kind of have to play around with it.



04:17

For sure. And is there any concern that sex could hurt the baby in any way?

04:23

Yeah, so this is actually the number one question I get asked is, well, isn't, aren't they gonna hurt the baby? No. Baby is very, very protected. And so baby is sitting in this sack of fluid that cushions it. But then you have this mucus plug that protects that basically, your cervix is what eventually opens to allow baby to come out. And so that mucus plug is preventing anything from kind of penetrating the cervix and so you don't really have to worry because baby is really up in there super comfortable in that sack. There's no concern that you're going to hit the baby

05:01

or anything like that.

05:03

You talked a little bit about discomfort. So might it help the person's partner to massage them or give them the background to help them become more comfortable?

05:12

Yes, for sure. And so that's actually a really good point. Because there are some, if you've ever had any kind of pelvic pain or pelvic floor pain, as a female, you know that sometimes penetration can be painful. And so with the changes in your body as you go through pregnancy, that can change as well. So a common area that gets really tight that people don't think about, I mean, we think about let's massage the back or the hips, but people don't think about the inner thighs as much and the inner thigh area, those muscles that run along the inside, they attach right into your pubic bone. And so that can be a really good area to massage to release tension if you're pregnant and you or if you've had a baby in the past where you had pubic symphysis pain is what it's called, is what the doctor will talk about, but its pain right at the center of your pubic bone in the front, massaging those muscles can help release the tension, and then allow penetration or allow, while all movements really to be a bit more comfortable. And then like I said, I mentioned already the back and the hips are also really good. But you might also just need to take more time where it might not be as easy because again, we talked about there being this baby in front of mom where so positions are going to be different. Fatigue might come into play or just not feeling. You know, a lot of times you hear people talk about or you hear women talk about when they're pregnant, they just don't feel awesome. They don't feel beautiful in their skin. And so you just might need to give yourself a little bit more time and that's totally okay. It doesn't have to be all or nothing. Maybe if you're having a hard time maybe it doesn't even lead to penetration. Maybe It's not, you know, vaginal sex, maybe it's another form of sex and that is totally safe as well.



07:07

Right? Right. Now it's very concerned that sex could cause you to go into labor, especially later and see.

07:15

Yeah, so that's, um, that's another thing that women will say is, when they're like ready for baby to come out, they're like, Okay, I'm doing all the things. I'm walking, I'm having sex and eating spicy foods, because they're trying to get baby out. So, if I so the the logic behind that is that if you can cause stimulation to the cervix, it might induce some movement of the cervix preparing for birth. And then if you orgasm, then there's some thought that the contraction of the uterus and the orgasm can start labor. But the reality is if your body isn't ready for labor, your body isn't ready for labor. Well, it's not gonna hurt anything. And it might be, you know, kind of fun to have like these last moments before baby to have, you know, that intimate time with your partner. It's not going to put you into into labor, that alone won't put you into labor.

08:16

Yeah. Great. That's very good to know. And so we've covered a lot of issues about sex during pregnancy. One issue we haven't talked about is do you think it's less likely that women will orgasm during while they're pregnant? Is that going to be an issue or you mentioned it may just take a little longer as well?

08:35

Yeah, so I don't think there's no research that says that women have a harder time orgasming while they're pregnant. But so one of one of my biggest pieces of advice for women I mean, if you're pregnant or not pregnant is to know yourself. And so if you know yourself and you're able to be in a position of openness while you're In this intimate time, that's going to allow you to orgasm better than if you're worried about what of everything else that's going on. So sometimes, like I said, we've talked mostly about vaginal sex, but oral sex and rectal sex, rectal sex, if there's hemorrhoids, obviously, that's not going to be very comfortable hemorrhoids is when you get bleeding through the anal opening. So, if that's it, you're probably not going to want to do that. Anyways. But there are other things that you can do if vaginal sex is just not your thing, or it's just not feeling good. So you can always turn to other methods. And it really is probably going to change during your trimesters to like your first trimester, you might be feeling one way and your third trimester be totally different. And that's normal. You're pregnant, right? Everything is changing as you go. So you kind of have to just see if you enjoy vaginal sex in your first year. trimester, and you're not as much in your third trimester and you prefer oral sex for the purpose of orgasm, then go for it. They're all safe. Yeah.



10:11

And one last question. During pregnancy, do you think that men? Do you often get questions from the women who are counseling about their partners, they have concerns that be brought to you.

10:24

Yeah. So their primary concern, I would say two things. So they're one of their primary concerns is that are they going to hurt the baby? And so we already discussed that, no, you can't reach the baby. But then their other concern is just keeping their pregnant mama safe. And so that's where it really comes into. That's where communication is so important, because again, if you had a certain sex life prior to getting pregnant, and now you're noticing there some changes and positional or just comfort levels in general, you just have to be open and communicate that because I promise you, you can find a way. You just have to be open to maybe doing like, maybe you never were on your side before. And maybe when you're in your third trimester, that's the most comfortable position for your belly. And so maybe that's where you go where you never did that before. And that's okay. It's okay to just try different things. But yeah, that's what they'll ask is, what am I keeping her safe? or What can I do to keep her safe? And the biggest thing is just support. Yeah.

11:30

And so I would think for some men, especially men often being heavier than their partner, they'd be worried that the weight of their body might be for the woman. But you're saying that if the woman's comfortable with it, it's safe also for the baby?

11:44

Yes. Yeah, our bodies. The female body is incredible with how it grows a baby, just that fact alone. But our body, our body, the way it protects the baby. While we're pregnant, it's not gonna you'll be warned, right? If he's if he or your partner is lying on top of you and it's not comfortable, you're gonna know, no, it's up to you if you listen to that, but you're gonna know if something isn't feeling right. And so then you just again, you just like pause and move. Um, one thing that we haven't touched on really quickly is if there's like a, if there's an uncomfortable feeling where you're wondering like, okay, was that normal discomfort with sex during pregnancy? Or do I need to call the doctor so sharp shooting, pain, bleeding, that's not explained. So sometimes after sex, you can have some, some bleeding and sometimes that's considered normal. If you're pregnant. I would recommend to consult with your doctor if there's any bleeding just to make sure but like the other day, I had a woman come in one of my clients and she had this benign cyst that wasn't it was like directly to the right of her cervix. So she had sex and she had some bleeding afterwards. It wasn't a lot, but of course any bleeding during pregnancy is going to



cause some uncomfortable feelings because again, you just want to make sure baby is safe. And so it was nothing, it was totally normal, it was okay. But to make sure I just always recommend calling your doctor after that. Um, there are certain things if you have placenta previa, which you would know your doctor would instruct you on it, it just means that your placenta is covering part of the cervix. That might be a time where your doctor is like, you know what, if you're going to have sex, let's try different forms of sex versus penetration. But again, very dependent on your individual situation. So always just being And in communication with your doctor or midwife or whoever is following you through pregnancy, to be to make sure that they're aware of what's going on and to make yourself feel comfortable too.

14:13

Okay, great. So we've covered a lot of topics about sex during pregnancy. After giving birth, you talk a little little bit about what would be appropriate time to consider having sex after having given birth.

14:26

Yeah, so um, if you're pregnant right now, this might be something that you haven't even thought of. But it's something that's so important because sex is not the same after having a baby. And this is true if it's c section, or vaginal delivery. So the general rule is to wait at least six weeks, you might find that at six weeks, you're still pretty sore and it just doesn't even sound like something you want to do, that's totally fine. Or you might be at six weeks and be like, let's go for it. So my biggest piece of advice here is that after giving birth, you should be the first person to explore this area. Meaning you should be the first to use a mirror, grab a mirror and look at it and feel it because what can happen is if you've had a bet we'll talk about vaginal. So if you've had a vaginal delivery, baby is passing through that birth canal, and then coming out and what can happen is if you've torn in their stitches there, the bottom side can feel a little abrasion and that's usually like you skinned your knee you know how you get like that like burning sensation kind of that because that there's a wound healing there. And so you want to know that you don't want the penis or the object to be the first thing to touch that area and you have no idea because then you're going to know Okay, cool. I am going to give myself a little bit more time. I know this is a little sore or Alright, that feels great. I don't have to worry about that. lubricant is super helpful if you're ready for that. If you're ready to have intercourse and you're you're feeling a little bit dry or you're feeling a little bit restricted lubricant is awesome. I recommend the lubricants slippery stuff because it's free of all of the nasty chemicals that you'll find in this stuff that's sold in, like typical stores, you can get it off of Amazon. But it's waterbased. You don't have to worry about it doing anything because we want to, especially after birth, we want to protect those tissues if you've had a C section. So if you've had a C section that was scheduled and planned, there probably hasn't been a whole lot of uterine



contraction. But even so there's changes that still occur in your body and your your body has been told that okay, I had this pregnancy though. So the hormones are changing. So again, even if it's a C section, you want to be the first person to know what that area feels like. And then if you had a C section that came after 48 hours of labor There's been contractions happening. And so there's still going to be those changes, you might not have the stitches that Abagnale birth might give you. But there's still gonna be changes to those tissues, and you still have the hormones flowing through that are kind of changing the body's reaction to everything. So yeah, so that's just make sure that you're the one who explores that area first. And it'll empower you to it'll make you feel comfortable in your body because you're going to know Yeah,

17:30

I think it helps to to be able to tell your partner Hey, my, my doctor, or my physical therapist has advised me to wait at least six weeks, maybe, depending on their condition.

17:41

Yeah. And if you said, you know, we talked a little bit about how important communication is while you're pregnant. And that communication after pregnancy because so we want to just make sure that we're still nurturing the relationship we have with our partner. So the communication after if you both know where you are, if you're both on the same page, it makes things a lot easier when you go to have when you are intimate again for the first time.

18:11

One important thing for people to realize too is that it's possible to become pregnant after giving birth, and we very much encourage women to wait at least a year between pregnancies to give their body time to fully recover, otherwise there is increased risk of damage or the child may not develop as well. So it is important to wait a good year between pregnancies if at all possible so you sex after pregnancy have protected sex?

18:42

Yes, and all I you know, I don't know what was, you know how they say like things like it's in the water. Um, I had four women within the last 9/10 months who, who've gotten pregnant When their baby, their first baby was less than a year old, and some of them are still breastfeeding while pregnant. So I mean, like the female body is incredible. But if you can give yourself a little bit more time, it doesn't mean that you're not going to recover, it doesn't mean that you can't have a full healthy return to where you want to be after giving birth to that second baby. But, you know, sometimes the body needs a little bit of a break.



19:30

Sure, sure. So we've also talked a lot about many of the cautions or questions people might have about sex during pregnancy. Let's also talk Can you talk a little bit about what are the advantages of having sex during pregnancy?

19:44

Yeah, so because we all want to know that right? Um, so sex in general, whether you're pregnant or not, has a ton of health benefits and none of those go away while you just because you're pregnant. Right. And so one of the biggest things is going to do is it's going to improve, it's going to send the same kind of sensation after you get done endorphins, right? If you go and have a workout and you get like that rush and surge of energy, it's going to give you that it's going to help calm and decrease stress. And then I keep talking about communication and connection. Sex is a big part of that. And when you are in a relationship with partner, whoever is helping you through this pregnancy process. You want that connection. And that doesn't just because you're pregnant doesn't mean that that has to go to go away. And after you give birth, it doesn't mean that you change from a sexual being to a non sexual being. You are in charge of how you want to go about that. But it doesn't mean that you just change and you're not sexual anymore. And so, sex is incredible for so many reasons. And pregnancy just at I mean, you just have a baby in front of you while you're having sex like it doesn't change Anything else?

21:02

Since a woman may not be as familiar with the idea of seeing a physical therapist who specializes in pelvic health? Hmm, a little bit about some of the reasons women may come and see a specialist like yourself?

21:14

Yes. So when somebody is pregnant, they come to see me for to prepare their pelvic floor for birth. Because, unfortunately, in our culture, we have taken away the need to squat and that's really the biggest piece of it. So because we sit in chairs, honestly, modern toilets, while I don't want to get rid of them, they that's what really took our need to have to be able to be in a deep squat away. And it's that deep squat position that the pelvic floor needs to be in in order to have a healthy pelvic floor for birth. Okay, so, our pelvic floor, the muscles that's inside of the pelvis and their jobs During pregnancy or during birth, excuse me is to lengthen in a controlled manner. We don't want them to squeeze and lift because babies trying to get out. And so if they can lengthen in a controlled manner, that's what we need. But because we don't ever get into a deep squat, you don't really know how to do that. And so that's why we've seen this big increase in the tears that happen and, and like the big tears, I mean, a little bit of tearing that's



considered normal, but like the big tears where it rips through all the layers of the muscle, that's why we see such a big increase in that. So if you can just start finding yourself in a deep squat, hold on to something you always hold on to something and just start squatting. That's one easy tip that you can do while you're pregnant to help prepare your pelvic floor for birth. And then after pregnancy. They come to see me for initiating the recovery of the pelvic floor muscles. So we don't treat pregnancy in America, like we would treat a bicep surgery right after a bicep surgery or knee surgery, that's easy. Those are easier places to connect to because we can see them right you can see your knee, you can see your arm, you can see your bicep muscle. And so if you were to have a surgery on it, you probably would get some advice afterwards. Right? A pregnancy and a birth after the baby travels through that vaginal canal or after you have a C section, those muscles are changed there is different things happening there. And so we need to know how to correctly facilitate the muscles in order to support us. And as women our pelvic floor is what houses our womb. And so we want to make sure that we're doing all we can to heal that space, not just physically but mentally, emotionally and spiritually. We want to make sure that we heal that space so that we are provided with our sense of security again, after we give birth,

24:02

right? So during pregnancy you advise some squatting exercises about one or two squat today we're talking about half a dozen.

24:12

Yeah, so here's this. Yeah, this is gonna kind of probably blow you away. So I'm okay Gaskin. I'm a Gaskin is okay. I'm also a doula. So I'm also a birth support person. So I'm a Gaskin is kind of like the mama of all doulas, and what she has recommended and what all of her studies have gone off of, is 300 squats a day.

24:41

Now, that's like a full time job.

24:46

And my advice is not to go to 300 squats a day right away, especially if you're you haven't been super active before pregnancy. So what I would recommend and again, I mentioned to hold on to something and that's so that you don't have to worry so much about like, the position of your shoulders and your back and your neck, it helps you keep a better form when you're squatting. So even if you don't have any, like stair rail or anything in your house to hold on to just use your kitchen sink, so you can hook your hands over the kitchen sink and squat down there, I would start with 10 a day. And then here's, um, instead of thinking of doing 300, or say you're going to



do 100, that day, or 50, whatever it is, instead of doing them all at once, do them in sets of 10 multiple times throughout the day, because that's going to remind your pelvic floor all day long that it needs to be able to lengthen versus if you do 30 in the morning and then 30 at night you give all day for the pelvic floor not to have to respond to that deep lengthening position that we talked about. And so if you can remind it more often throughout the day, it becomes more natural, it becomes more if you don't It doesn't have to be such a conscious effort, the pelvic floor will start to learn subconsciously that it needs to lengthen.

26:06

So the advantage of doing these exercises is that may lead to a somewhat easier birth. also reduce the risk of tearing.

26:14

Yes. Yeah, exactly.

26:17

Right. Great. Well, that's very helpful advice. So we've covered a lot of different topics during pregnancy, sex after pregnancy, and the idea of trying to build your pelvic muscles beforehand. Is there anything else you'd like to cover? Or summarize?

26:32

No, I think it just like in just to remember that sex during pregnancy is safe, unless like we talked about there are like sharp pain and bleeding or just something really doesn't feel right. Always be in communication with your doctor. And then after baby, give yourself some time and know your that area first before you go back in to having intercourse. Yeah.

26:57

All right. Well, thank you so much for your time.

27:02

I think it'll be very helpful to many women and couples. Thank you.

27:05

You're welcome.

