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Staying Connected with Tina Millican

Badabing, Badabang? Uh...Not so much!

My husband is counting the days when the doctor gives us the “ok” to have sex again. He reminds me daily (or so it seems) and to be honest, I am not thinking about, have any desire, or really want to have sex. Having a newborn and breastfeeding has drained me of every bit of energy I have. I love my husband and don’t want to hurt his feelings but to be honest, I just don’t have that “loving” feeling right now. Can I get a prescription not to have sex?

For medical reasons, it is important for you to wait to have sex until your doctor or midwife gives you the ok – usually 6-8 weeks. For many women, it is well after six week and can even be up to a year before they actually get their “groove” back. While a prescription “not to have sex” might make things easier for those not ready, open and honest communication with your husband is a wise way to handle the situation.

What is normal?

It is normal for new moms to have a lower sex drive after baby is born. The added hormones that are around, especially when breastfeeding, can actually suppress sex drive. It is also normal for new parents to feel exhausted. Thinking about sex is either not on their radar, they simply don’t have the energy, or timing is off between the couple. For some women, self-esteem is at an all-time low. A change in body image often leaves the new mom feeling she is undesirable to her husband. It is crucial for the new father to make his partner feel cherished during this time. And last, but not least, Dad’s uncertainty and confusion about the newness and changes to the relationship may make arousal more difficult. Experiencing any of these can make it difficult for new parents to become intimate. Also, finding a time when both of you have that loving feeling may be a challenge.

What can you do?

In all the newness of bringing a baby into your lives, acknowledge that your relationship has changed and may require building a “new” relationship. It is important to become a couple again. From the book, *And Baby Make Three: Six-Step Plan for Preserving Marital Intimacy and Rekindling Romance after Baby Arrives*, Dr. John Gottman states, “The greatest gift a couple can give their baby is a loving relationship because that relationship nourishes baby’s development. The stronger the connection between parents, the healthier the child can grow, both emotionally and intellectually.” Take some time to talk about the changes your relationship has gone through (including sex) and be open to some modifications. Talking through things early on can prevent resentment, anger and bitterness that may be looming.

What if you are not interested in sex? There is more to intimate relationships than sex. Most of the time, but not always, men are the first to initiate sex after baby is born. It is important to take your husband's feelings into consideration. Besides looking forward to being sexually intimate with his wife, he may also be feeling a little left out. Prior to baby, he had all of your time, now he must share your time with baby. You both need a little time together to reconnect. Start building intimacy at a slow pace; cuddle, hold hands, go for a walk together, give each other a massage, kiss, or just talk. Communicating through conversation and laughter will help release tension and begin to build back that "loving" feeling. Rekindle the spark that drew you together in the first place.

According to Dr. William Stayton, professor in the Human Sexuality Program at the University of Pennsylvania:

"Every relationship requires two things, maintenance and nurturing. Maintenance is the task necessary for living and nurturance is building and keeping the relationship alive. When you first started dating, and building a relationship, nurturance was 90 percent of your relationship and 10 percent was maintenance. When you started living together, maintenance took a greater percentage of your time. When a child is born, maintenance can take 90+ percent of your time and 10 percent or less goes to nurturance. Over a period of time, this can become disastrous to your relationship. Keep nurturance as important as maintenance and you will be building for a loving and sexually fulfilling future."

Bottom line, there is no need to rush into resuming sex after baby is born. It will take time to figure out this new relationship you now have together. Try instead to reach a balance between what is needed to both nurture and maintain your relationship and talk about it. It takes two to tango and when your relationship is in alignment or at balance, the tango will not feel so foreign or undesirable.

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