

NPN February Column:
All Things Maternal – A Therapist’s Perspective

By Deena Solwren, LCSW

Q1: My OB said I could resume sexual activity after 6 weeks, but it’s almost 5 months and I still have no interest in having sex. When will things be “back to normal”?

Just because your doctor says it is physically “safe” to resume intercourse, it doesn’t mean you’re ready emotionally. When one becomes ready varies from person to person and depends on biological, psychological and social factors.

“Almost 5 months” is really not that long since you gave birth. Your body is still adjusting to having grown a whole human being and delivered a baby. If you are nursing, your hormone levels remain elevated which offers a natural, biological protection to direct your energy to your infant’s needs. You may still be considerably sleep deprived so in addition to being tired, you have less energy and less time to devote to yourself and your partner. You’re body and psyche may be naturally working together to conserve resources for other priorities, ie, caring for your infant. You may find your sex drive returning as you nurse less, as you become increasingly comfortable with your new role as a mother, and as the baby’s independence increases. Biology intersects with the baby’s developmental needs and your own psychology to inform you when it’s ok to be more other directed.

In addition to biological influences, psychological factors strongly influence sex drive.

Does your idea of being a mother also allow you to be sexy and sexual? Societal attitudes about women infiltrate our subconscious. Social mores continue to dichotomize women as either “Madonna” or “Whore”. How does one incorporate being both a good, loving, giving mother and a sexual, pleasure-seeking, self-indulgent, human being?

I wonder what having sex means to you now? Did it mean something different before the baby came along? Is it something engaged in for fun?...a form of validation?...a way to bond?...a ritual?...something to endure?...exercise?...stress release?...all of the above?...something else, entirely?...

How do you feel about your body?... the way it’s changed... stretch marks, sagging breasts, softer stomach, wider hips, C-section scar... . Any and all of these things could inhibit or excite your desire.

Are you afraid of getting pregnant again, before you’re ready?

If all was well (satisfying, supportive, contented,) in your relationship prior to having a baby, and things remain emotionally sound, I imagine your sex drive will return as you

further adjust to being a mother. Both birth parents and adoptive parents confront significant changes to their daily routines and sense of self when becoming parents. Frequently, having a baby ushers in more changes for the mother/primary parent than the father/partner. Whether or not mom returns to work after 6 weeks or 6 months, whether or not she's solely breast feeding or bottle feeding, much of her emotional energy is necessarily and appropriately focused on the baby. The partner may have taken a few days or even weeks off, but often quickly returns to his or her usual work routine. Some couples begin to drift apart and sexual desire diminishes accordingly. It is important to work on maintaining your relationship as partners and friends. Try to find adult, alone time together whether it's going out to dinner or taking a walk or engaging in an activity that you mutually enjoyed prior to having children.

Currently, while you may not want to have sex, you might be amenable to snuggling and cuddling – which may or may not lead to anything further. This could help enhance a sense of togetherness and intimacy. Simply sharing with your partner when you find him/her especially attractive or have a passing thought about sex, can help your partner feel appreciated. It conveys that you are still interested in your partner as a lover and not solely absorbed by the baby. It may also create a small space within you to be aware of when you do feel a little bit sexual. Eventually, this may grow into passionate desire.

“All Things Maternal” is a trademark of Deena Solwren's. Deena is a licensed clinical social worker (LCSW) and a mom who's been there. She has a private psychotherapy practice with offices in Rockridge and Pinole. She works with individuals and couples regarding infertility, pregnancy, post-partum adjustment, attachment parenting, changing roles & changing self image, balancing work & family life, mother/daughter relationships, and infant & early childhood (0-5 year old) socio-emotional development. She is currently accepting new clients into her private practice and may be reached at (510)594-8224.