Arousal while breastfeeding [1]

Hi Alice,

Can a lady actually get in the mood when breastfeeding?

Answer

Dear Reader,

Breastfeeding is often pleasant for women because of feelings of closeness and tenderness with their child, and yes — sometimes it can even be arousing. In fact, in some studies up to 50 percent of women found breastfeeding to be an erotic experience, but sadly a quarter of these women also experience shame and guilt over this. Although feeling sexually stimulated during breastfeeding may be uncomfortable and jarring, it is actually a completely normal response.

The hormones released during lactation explain some of the connection between breastfeeding and arousal. When a baby suckles at her/his mother's breast, the nipple stimulation causes the release of prolactin and oxytocin [2]. Affectionately known as the "cuddle hormone," "trust hormone," and "love hormone," oxytocin is also released in large quantities during childbirth, and in lesser quantities during hugging, touching, and orgasm. The release of oxytocin can sometimes cause uterine contractions, similar to those experienced during orgasm. Again, while these sensations may feel odd and uncomfortable in the context of breastfeeding, it does not mean this sexual desire is directed towards the child. It simply means these hormones are working properly!

As mentioned, some women feel embarrassed and "wrong" because they experience pleasure during breastfeeding. Some even go so far as to cause themselves pain during breastfeeding to combat their feelings of arousal or stop breastfeeding altogether. If you are breastfeeding and facing shame or guilt such as this, you may want to seek support from a counselor, from an online or in-person mommy support group, or from your friends and family.

Alice!
Category:
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Resources

- Counseling and Psychological Services (CPS) (Morningside)
- Mental Health Services (CUIMC)

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[1] https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/arousal-while-breastfeeding