Dear Alice,
My wife and I had our first child last July. Until about 3 months ago, she was unable to reach orgasm at all. Of late, she has very small one's, but they don't seem to be getting much better. Prior to having the baby, she had strong, very quick (3-5 minutes) orgasms 90% of the time. I know the stress of being at work rather than home with the baby could play a part in this. Is this common and is there a way to mitigate the problem?
-- The Way We Were

Answer

Dear The Way We Were,

While much preparation and planning may go into having a baby, the issues surrounding sexuality during and after pregnancy are less commonly addressed.

Physiology, first: Orgasm is a reflex occurring when the body has had sufficient effective stimulation. It serves as a pressure cooker valve or a circuit breaker, allowing the body to go back to its unaroused state. The muscle that begins the orgasm in women is the pubococcygeal muscle, a sling of striated muscles that holds the genitals in place. Women can identify the muscle by using the muscle to shut off the urine flow midstream. (Men have this muscle, too, and can find it the same way. When they squeeze their pubococcygeal muscle, their penis seems to "wave".)

The way to get orgasms back-- in number, strength, and intensity-- is to exercise this muscle by doing "Kegels", the exercise named for Dr. Arnold Kegel. The stronger the pubococcygeal muscle, the stronger the orgasm, (true for both men and women). Understandably, during childbirth this muscle stretches like a rubber band, but usually with time and Kegels, regains its elasticity. Occasionally, the muscle may be damaged, especially if a woman has an episiotomy. Your wife's provider can check her pubococcygeal muscle to measure its strength and elasticity and can give her more information about these exercises.

It's interesting that you are asking this question, rather than your wife. It may make sense to show her your question and the response so that she can make an informed decision about "Kegeling". It's possible that she may feel as if this is one more thing for her to do, especially with...
the many demands a new baby can bring. Orgasms may or may not be a priority with her at this time. You've mentioned the stress and fatigue she feels, juggling a new baby, a new childcare arrangement, her work out of the home, and her relationship with you.

If your wife is eager to Kegel, then adding it to activities she is already doing can remove some of the pressure. For example, Kegeling when she breastfeeds, holds the baby, or talks on the phone, may not feel like a burden.

Good luck to you and your wife,

Alice!

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