

Health info for moms and moms-to-be

Lost: A New Mother's Libido

Q I've heard that sex is the last thing on new moms' minds—sometimes for months. Is this true?

A It's more than a rumor: For some mothers, it's a reality. A lack of interest in sex can result from a combination of factors—including pain, depression, sleep deprivation, or simply feeling harried and overwhelmed.

But if you're nursing, it'll probably be even harder to get in the mood. Elevated levels of the hormone prolactin, which stimulates milk secretion, can suppress production of testosterone, one of the hormones responsible for the sex

drive in both men and women. "It's normal to have a low sex drive the whole time you're breastfeeding," says Judith Seifer, Ph.D., a past president of the American Association of Sex Educators, Counselors and Therapists. In fact, don't be surprised if it takes three to four weeks after your milk dries up for your libido to return completely.

Even if you're not nursing, don't expect estrogen levels to return to normal until at least six weeks postpartum. Less estrogen means the mucous membranes of the vagina aren't as lubricated, which could make intercourse uncomfortable. In that case, a water-soluble lubricant can help. —*Michele Pullia Turk*

Give yourself time—the notion for nooky will reappear



Prenatal Vitamins: Rx or OTC?

You've been dutifully taking the vitamins prescribed at your first prenatal visit. Then, while strolling through the drugstore, you spot a bottle of over-the-counter (OTC) prenatal vitamins—no prescription necessary and a much lower price. What gives: Is one supplement better than the other?

It's hard to say. "The main difference is that prescription prenatal vitamins contain a full milligram [or 1,000 micrograms] of folic acid," says Ronald Chez, M.D., professor of obstetrics and gynecology at the University of South Florida. OTC vitamins, on the other hand, have a maximum of 800 micrograms (mcg) of the B vitamin. But why that additional 200 mcg might be better—and who needs it—isn't clear. Folic acid is important for *all* moms-to-be—as well as women who are planning to conceive—because it reduces the risk of neural tube birth defects such as spina bifida. But the recommended daily intake for pregnant women is 400 mcg. More folic acid than that—whether 400 mcg or

600 mcg more—isn't harmful and may simply offer a little extra insurance toward having a healthy baby.

Also unclear is which vitamins may be the best value. A month's supply of drugstore vitamins could cost as little as \$4, compared to about \$14 for StuartNatal Plus, one of most-prescribed brands. So OTCs would seem to be the winners. But many insurance plans cover prescription vitamins, so you may pay little or nothing. Another difference, depending on the brand of vitamin: **OTC formulas are less likely to have unnecessary (but harmless) preservatives, sweeteners, and dyes and they may contain more of some minerals like magnesium, which helps prevent very high blood pressure, says Allan Magaziner, D.O., a specialist in nutritional medicine in Cherry Hill, New Jersey.**

The only certain bottom line is that you should talk to your doctor about which supplements are best for you, especially if you have to pay for them yourself. —*Michelle Bowers*