



the whoopee report

STORY
Shawn
Bean

Quickies, wounded libidos and 3 a.m. rendezvous: Thanks to the largest sex survey in *Babytalk* history, we've been invited into bedrooms of parents everywhere. You won't believe what we found.

Your bedroom used to be just that: a bedroom. Now it's a makeshift nursery, day-care center, storage facility and pump station. But newborns don't only change ground zero for your sex life. They can change the quality and quantity of sex, the level of intimacy and, perhaps most important, the biology of a woman's body.

Because sex is such a private and taboo subject, getting specific details about post-baby coitus is a real struggle. (There's a good reason the guy who invented the "Do Not Disturb" sign is a millionaire.) Hence why we commissioned a study to learn about the sexual practices of new parents nationwide. **More than 10,000 people—96 percent of whom were female—participated, making it the largest sex survey in the magazine's history.** Short of peeking through the neighbors' blinds, this is as close as we'll ever get to seeing what's happening in America's most private rooms. With the help of ob-gyns, pediatricians, therapists and sexperts, we present the study's most interesting facts and trends, plus tips for restoring the bedroom to the love nest it once was.

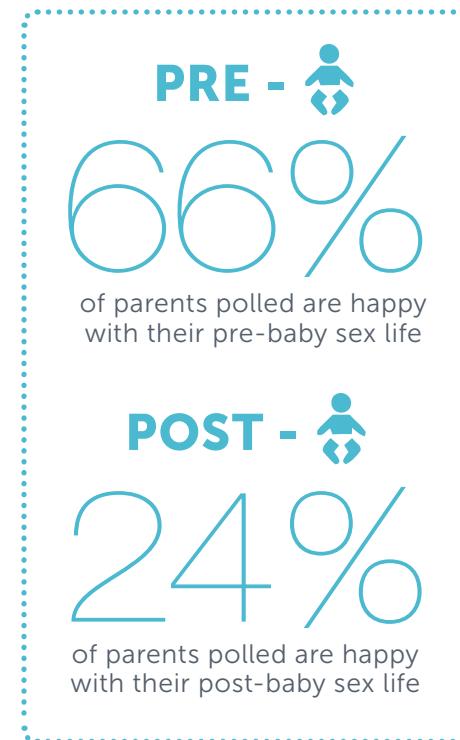
which one of these is not like the others?

			
a. oysters	b. chocolate	c. scented candles	d. infants

When it comes to aphrodisiacs, babies rarely make the list, and our survey proves it: Among respondents, 66 percent were happy with their pre-baby sex life, yet only 24 percent are happy with their post-baby sex life. "Pre-baby, you're trying to conceive, so you're focusing on sex," says Jill Grimes, M.D., a family physician and sexual health expert in Austin and associate editor of *The 5-Minute Clinical Consult*. "When you're having more sex, you have more opportunity to improve the quality as well as the quantity. Practice makes perfect."

That changes with the new arrival for several reasons, including basic anatomy and physiology. Irwin Goldstein, M.D., editor-in-chief of *The Journal of Sexual Medicine* and director of sexual medicine at Alvarado Hospital in San Diego, puts it bluntly: "An 8-pound item coming through the vagina can have a major anatomic impact." The tearing of the perineum and other genital tissue, episiotomies and hormonal surges—ouch!—can all complicate mom's sexual health. According to a recent study about postpartum pain published in *The Journal of Sexual Medicine*, nearly half of all respondents reported an episode of pelvic or genital pain lasting three months or more. Dr. Goldstein adds that approximately 20 percent of the women he treats suffer from problems related to childbirth.

"It's also about the hormone changes and what they do to how you feel," says Tania Paredes, a psychotherapist and couples counselor in Miami and Fort Lauderdale, Florida. "Parenthood figures into 50 percent of the patients I see."



[SLEEP > SEX]
74% of parents polled said sleep is more important than sex

"Moms who breastfeed fight less with their partner and are less worried about their partner cheating."

LETIZIA MCCALLU/GETTY

the side-effects of a c-section

What did Caesar know anyway? According to the survey, women who had Caesarean sections are more likely than those who had vaginal births to feel self-conscious with their post-baby bodies, have no libido and—perhaps the reason for the previous two—struggle with postpartum depression.

"Needing to have a C-section after being in labor for hours is often felt as a 'failure' by the mother," explains Michele Hakakha, M.D., an ob-gyn in private practice in Beverly Hills, and co-author of *Expecting 411*. And in cases of emergency C-sections, "these babies are often separated from mom. All of these factors could lead to a higher rate of postpartum depression."

looking for romance? don't ask a parent

When asked, "How often do you go on date night?" 67 percent say every few months or never; only 8 percent have a date night once a week. Creating a romantic rendezvous at home is equally challenging. Eighty-two percent have sex either before bed or in the middle of the night, and nearly 60 percent say their partner is the one who initiates sex more often. Hypothesis, considering that 96 percent of our respondents are women: Is dad making a move on mom after those late-night feedings? Not too suave, Dad Juan de Marco.

"It's a lack of intimacy, not sex, that mars the relationship," says psychotherapist Tania Paredes. "Sex is a physical act. Intimacy doesn't even have to lead to touching. It can be sitting close together while watching a movie. Women put intimacy higher on their priority list than sex."

breastfeeders vs. non-breastfeeders: who's having better sex?

Interestingly, mom's decision regarding whether to breastfeed not only affects baby's health, but mom's sexual health as well.

According to the survey, breastfeeding moms are having a tougher time with post-baby sex than non-breastfeeding moms: They're less happy with their post-baby sex lives, feel less sexy and experience more pain during intercourse. When asked, "How soon after baby did you have sex?" 9 percent of breastfeeding moms say they are still waiting, compared with 2 percent of non-breastfeeding moms. Also, women who aren't breastfeeding are having a much more dynamic post-baby sexual experience: They have more quickies, foreplay and sexual fantasies.

For breastfeeding moms, biology is the chief libido crusher. A breastfeeding mother produces a surplus of prolactin, a hormone made by the pituitary gland in the brain. Prolactin decreases estrogen levels, which in turn thins the vaginal walls and decreases vaginal secretions—nature's way of preventing

ovulation so mom doesn't get pregnant again right away. The result is dry, uncomfortable sex.

A breastfeeding mom also gets less sleep, which inhibits libido. "She's up every two to four hours either feeding her child or pumping her milk to store," says Dr. Hakakha. "If a new mom chooses not to breast-feed, she may be sleeping through the night, as her partner or another caregiver can bottle-feed formula."

Then there's the issue of mom's breasts, which have transformed from erotic icons to infant smorgasbord. "Your breasts become less of a sexual entity and more of a nourishment outlet," Dr. Grimes explains. "When you've got a baby constantly suckling at your breast, you don't really want hubby lining up for his turn."

While breastfeeding can hamper mom's sexual connection, her

How many respondents have sex more than once a week?



emotional connection has only become stronger. Compared with non-breastfeeding moms, breastfeeding moms fight less with their partner and are less worried about their partner cheating. When asked why they're having less post-baby sex, 48 percent of breastfeeders chose "I'm preoccupied with baby," compared with 32 percent of non-breastfeeders.

Dr. Hakakha has a theory why breastfeeding moms have a stronger bond. Oxytocin, another hormone made by the pituitary gland, is released during breastfeeding. Oxytocin stimulates the part of the brain involved in trust and reinforcement, which leads to bonding. "Looking at it from a Darwinian standpoint," she explains, "it causes women to bond to their partners so they can have more babies and perpetuate the species, and to their children so they will nurture and protect them." Non-breastfeeding moms earn their own smaller dose of oxytocin from holding, cuddling and feeding baby.

BREASTFEEDING MOMS, READ HERE!



reigniting the flame

be patient Mom's body needs a break after delivery. The standard recommendation is to wait four to six weeks after a vaginal delivery. If you had a C-section, your doctor may suggest waiting longer. Once you resume, think sparklers, not fireworks. "For most women, the first few times they have intercourse in the postpartum period are uncomfortable," says Dr. Hakakha.

back to basics Just because you can't rev the engines for those first couple of months doesn't mean you have to turn off the car. "We tend to forget what we did before we had sex," Paredes says. "There's a lot you can do that doesn't include penetration, like touching, kissing, hugging, playing and rubbing."

got lube? For breastfeeding moms, the increase of prolactin leads to a decrease in vaginal secretions. Try a water-based lubricant like Astroglide.

date night, stat! Scheduling regular outings with your partner is critical, but "don't mix baby and date night," says Paredes. "Taking the family to Babies R Us and then dinner doesn't count." Date night doesn't have to be a scene out of a chick flick either. "Date night can be a candlelit dinner, but don't limit yourself. Drop off the baby with a

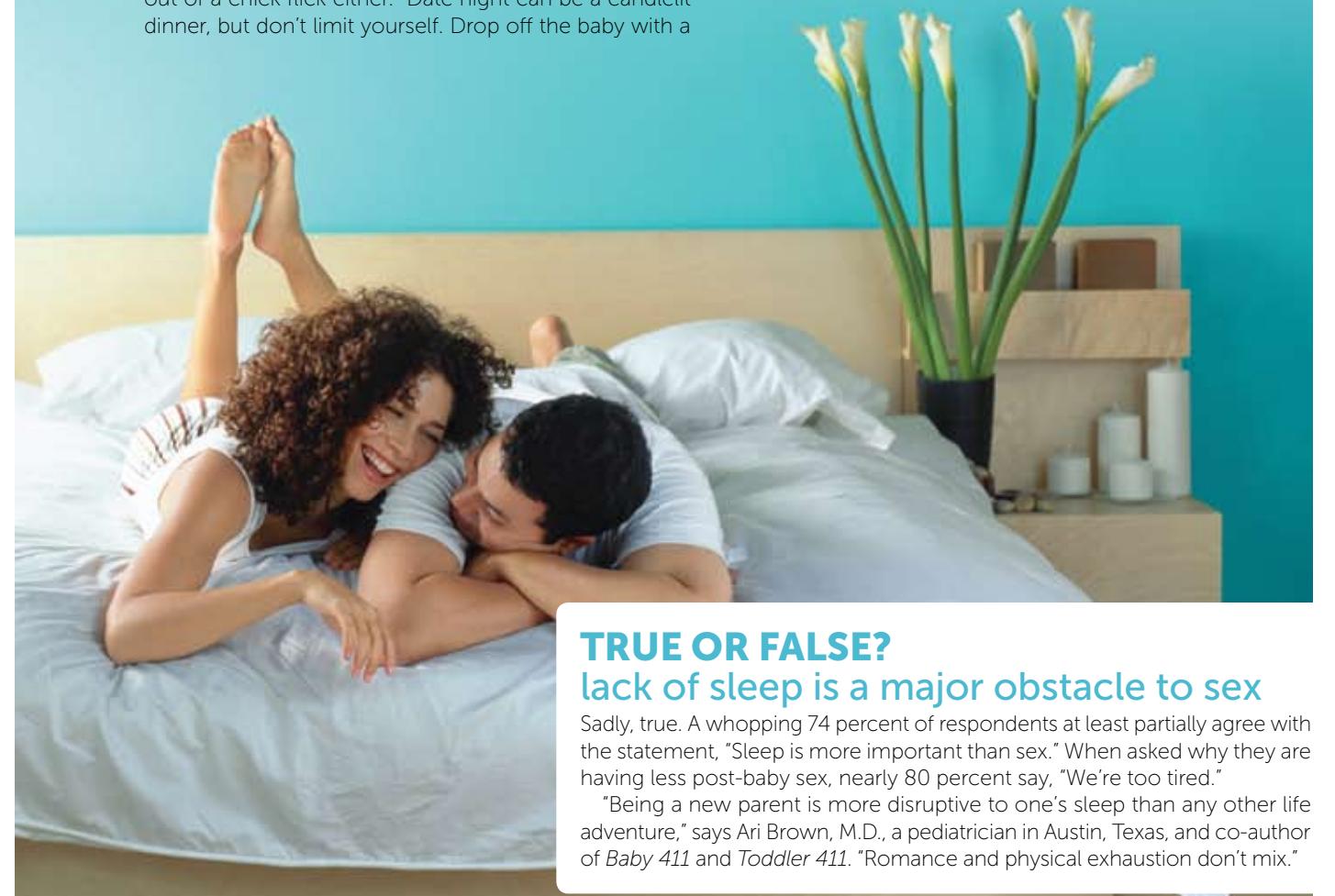
family member or babysitter and go window-shopping through a mall. Being in each other's presence is what's important."

happy wife, happy life A woman might go through a "self-esteem plunge" during the first year of motherhood, says Paredes. "She feels uncomfortable in her body that she may not even recognize. She feels guilty about going back to work and incorporating her pre-baby life into her post-baby life. We need to give mom more credit and patience."

Perhaps dad needs to lead the charge here. "Help around the house more," Dr. Grimes says. "The baby introduces many new chores, and the previous ones do not disappear." The easiest chore of all: regular compliments. "Guys need to remember to tell new moms they're beautiful," she adds. "And please—compliments need to come all the time, not just when they're asking for sex."

60%

say their partner is the one who initiates sex



TRUE OR FALSE? lack of sleep is a major obstacle to sex

Sadly, true. A whopping 74 percent of respondents at least partially agree with the statement, "Sleep is more important than sex." When asked why they are having less post-baby sex, nearly 80 percent say, "We're too tired."

"Being a new parent is more disruptive to one's sleep than any other life adventure," says Ari Brown, M.D., a pediatrician in Austin, Texas, and co-author of *Baby 411* and *Toddler 411*. "Romance and physical exhaustion don't mix."

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