

Sex Close to Due Date may Cause Spontaneous Labor, Study Finds.

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COLUMBUS, Ohio, June 2 < Despite a widely believed old wives' tale, having sex near the end of pregnancy won't speed up the start of labor.

In fact, it might even delay labor onset for a few days, according to research here.

"Patients may continue to hear the 'old wives' tale' that intercourse will hasten labor, but according to this data, they should not hear it from the medical community," said Jonathan Schaffir, M.D., of the Ohio State Medical Center here.

"Many pregnant women (and some physicians) believe that sexual intercourse at term will hasten the onset of labor," Dr. Schaffir noted in the June issue of *Obstetrics & Gynecology*. To test the issue, he enrolled 95 women in a study evaluating the effect of intercourse in the weeks before delivery.

Over the one-year period from July 2004 to July 2005, women with a low-risk pregnancy were asked to take part in the study at the next office visit after they finished their 37th week. All 95 of the women who were approached agreed to take part but two delivered at another institution and were not included in the data analysis.

Overall, Dr. Schaffir said, slightly 47 of 93 of the women (50.5%) reported having sex at some point over the final few weeks of their pregnancy. That proportion is larger than the 26% found in the largest study of sexual behavior in pregnancy, he said.

But the sex didn't bring the pregnancy to term more quickly: The sexually active women delivered their babies at an average gestational age of 39.9 weeks, compared with 39.3 weeks in the abstinent group. The difference, about four days, was statistically significant at $P=0.001$, but not clinically significant, Dr. Schaffir said.

Dr. Schaffir also calculated Bishop scores to judge the effect of intercourse on cervical ripening; the theory was that prostaglandins in semen, and possibly the physical effects of intercourse and orgasm, might make the cervix more favorable.

However, he said, there was no significant effect, either for any intercourse or for frequency of intercourse.

The study had some limitations, Dr. Schaffir said. For one thing, the study was retrospective, depending on reports from the women at each office visit and after birth. The details of the sexual activity are also not analyzed, including such things as "degree of arousal and engorgement, presence of orgasm, and possibility of multiple orgasms," he said.

Also, there's the possibility that just being enrolled in the study might have inspired some of the women to try sex during the last weeks of pregnancy when they might otherwise not have done so.

While there's no apparent morbidity associated with having sex late in pregnancy, Dr. Schaffir said, there's also no data suggesting that physicians should recommend it.

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Jonathan Schaffir et al. "Sexual intercourse at term does not hasten the onset of labor or result in cervical ripening." *Obstet Gynecol* 2006 107: 1310-1314.

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Sex close to due date may cause spontaneous labor, study finds

NEW YORK (Reuters) -- Women who have sexual intercourse during late pregnancy are more likely than abstinent women to have a spontaneous delivery at 38 to 40 weeks' and less likely to require labor induction, according to results of a study conducted in Malaysia.

It is commonly believed that coitus hastens labor, but very little research has been published to confirm this theory, Dr. Peng Chiong Tan and associates point out in the medical journal *Obstetrics and Gynecology*.

Tan, from the University of Malaya in Kuala Lumpur, and colleagues designed a study in which 200 healthy, married women with uncomplicated pregnancies completed diaries regarding sexual activity beginning at week 36 of pregnancy. Labor induction was carried out among women who had not delivered after about 41 weeks of pregnancy.

The women's diaries showed that 116 (58 percent) of women had intercourse in late pregnancy an average of four times. Twenty-five women required labor induction because of prolonged pregnancy.

The results showed that 6.9 percent of sexually active women had not delivered by 41 weeks, compared with 29.8 percent of abstinent women.

After factors such as ethnicity, education, occupation, perception of coital safety and husbands' age were taken into account, women who had sexual intercourse were 90 percent more likely to have delivered by 41 weeks and almost 100% had a less likely to require labor induction compared with women not engaging in sexual intercourse.

Tan's team also found that having intercourse more than once per week was inversely associated with prolonged pregnancy and the need for labor induction.

Although the researchers recommend sexual intercourse as a means of avoiding labor induction, they add that "in potentially compromised pregnancies caution has to be applied because the effect of intercourse and orgasm has been described as being similar to an oxytocin contraction stress test."