

Children really are the best contraception

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Parenting a young infant can be exhausting, and potentially deplete parents' cognitive and emotional resources, but can it also intrude on parents' sex life?

A new study from Flinders University reveals it is not the baby's

disrupted sleep patterns—common in the first months of life—but rather engaging with the baby during crib-side visits which is the biggest disincentive to [parents'](#) sexual frequency.

The study used data from 897 parents of babies aged 1–18 months, recorded in an [online survey](#) covering sexual frequency and satisfaction, sleep, relationship satisfaction, depression, and demographic characteristics. Infant sleep and night-[time](#) crib visits were objectively measured over two weeks using novel computer-vision technology via a baby monitoring device.

Using both parental online responses and the auto-videosomnography technology across a total of 8,460 nights collectively showed that more parent night-time crib visits were significantly associated with lower sexual frequency.

For example, parents who engaged with their infant 0–0.5 times per night on average, reported having partnered [sexual activity](#) 4.2 times per month, whereas parents who engaged with their infant over 4 times per night had sex 50% less often (only 2.3 times per month).

"These findings suggest that it is not infant or parent sleep disruption per se, but rather parent nighttime engagement with the infant that is associated with lower parent sexual activity frequency," says Flinders University researcher Dr. Michal Kahn.

The link between parental night-time engagement with the infant and lower sexual activity frequency was significant regardless of infant age.

"While young infants require lots of external regulation to fall asleep, most infants can gradually learn to regulate themselves to sleep across the second half of the first year. As sexual and sleep health both have a major impact on well-being, parents wishing to restore their sleep and

sexual activity can gradually encourage more independent [infant sleep](#)," notes Dr. Kahn.

By contrast, sexual satisfaction was not associated with parent night-time caregiving, parent or infant sleep, or parent-infant sleeping arrangements in adjusted models, suggesting that [satisfaction](#) ratings may not be susceptible to the effects of disrupted sleep in the postpartum period.

The results published in *The Journal of Sex Research* also indicated that the [frequency](#) of partnered sexual activity in the first 18 months was 3.8 ± 4.2 times per month. Frequency of sexual activity increased with infant age, yet increases beyond the first six months postpartum were non-significant.

This study highlights how the postpartum period often poses a considerable challenge for both parent [sleep](#) and sexual activity.

More information: Michal Kahn et al, Let's Talk about Sleep Baby: Sexual Activity Postpartum and Its Links with Room Sharing, Parent Sleep, and Objectively Measured Infant Sleep and Parent Nighttime Crib Visits, *The Journal of Sex Research* (2022). [DOI: 10.1080/00224499.2022.2092050](#)

Provided by Flinders University

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