Childbirth does not appear to significantly affect a woman’s long-term sexual health, according to researchers from the University of California San Francisco (UCSF).

They found that the number of births and the method of delivery did not significantly influence a woman’s sexual desire, activity, or satisfaction later on.

Almost 1,100 women from northern California participated in the study. Each woman had given birth at least two years prior. Seventy-four percent of them were over age 50 (mean age 56.3) and most had had two or three children. Eighty-six percent had delivered their babies vaginally and 7% had had caesarean deliveries. Another 7% had had mixed vaginal and caesarean deliveries.

Forty-eight percent of the women were white or Caucasian. The rest were black or African-American (20%), Asian or Asian-American (16%), or Latina/Hispanic (17%). Fifty-one percent of the group said they were in excellent or very good overall health.

Each woman completed a questionnaire that addressed her sexual desire, activity, satisfaction, and problems. Professional abstractors also analyzed the participants’ health records.

Fifty-five percent of the women had low or very low sexual desire. Fifty-three percent said they had less than monthly sexual activity and 20% said they had low or very low sexual satisfaction. Low arousal, poor vaginal lubrication, and pain or discomfort during vaginal intercourse were some of the more commonly-reported sexual problems.

After examining the data, the researchers concluded that the number of births and types of deliveries didn’t affect the women’s sexual desire, frequency, or satisfaction. Factors related to childbirth – such as episiotomy (incisions made near the vaginal opening), spinal anesthesia, and delivery after 40 weeks of pregnancy – also didn’t influence later sexual function.

Instead, it appeared that age, ethnicity, health status, and partner availability were more likely to affect women’s long-term sex lives.

For example, older women were more likely to have decreased sexual desire and have less than monthly sexual activity. And those without partners said they had low desire and low satisfaction, along with less frequent sex.
“These findings provide reassuring evidence for women, who have had or are planning to have children, that neither the total number of deliveries nor type of delivery is likely to have a substantial long-term detrimental effect on their sexual function,” said senior author Alison Huang, MD, MAS, in a press release. Dr. Huang is an assistant professor of medicine at the UCSF Division of General Internal Medicine.

“Instead, discussions between women and their doctors should be focused on other health and contextual factors that may influence sexual activity later in life,” Dr. Huang added.

The study was published in the November 2013 edition of Obstetrics & Gynecology.

Resources

**Obstetrics and Gynecology**

Fehniger, Julia E., MD, et al.

“Childbirth and Female Sexual Function Later in Life”

(Full-text. November 2013)

[http://journals.lww.com/greenjournal/Abstract/2013/11000/Childbirth_and_Female_Sexual_Function_Later_in.10.aspx](http://journals.lww.com/greenjournal/Abstract/2013/11000/Childbirth_and_Female_Sexual_Function_Later_in.10.aspx)

**University of California, San Francisco**

Rush-Monroe, Karin

“Childbirth Not Significant Contributor to Later Sexual Dysfunction”

(October 9, 2013)