

Baby's
NECTAR



Oxytocin

The real MVP when it comes to labour,
birth, & lactation

Oxytocin

DID YOU KNOW?

Most of us know & understand that the hormone oxytocin is associated with the feeling of love and comfort.

Many don't know, however, of this hormone's significant



involved in uterine contractions during labour and that it is also responsible for assisting in lactation all while playing an integral part in tapping into your natural, inborn instinct to parent.

Natural vaginal birth, skin to skin contact between mother and baby, and breastfeeding are a sequence of events that are vital in terms of promoting the natural release of oxytocin. This is the way that human mothers biologically adapt to motherhood.

According to the book Oxytocin: The Biological Guide to Motherhood

Humans, much like other mammals, are born with the instinctual ability and knowledge to care for their offspring. However - humans are a highly intelligent species that have developed immensely in terms of cognitive, social, and communicative abilities, these skills and this intelligence happen to have an adverse affect on our intuition.



Simply put - our intelligence as a species negatively impacts the inborn competence that we possess, as mammals, to birth, breastfeed, and care for our babies. Isn't that super interesting? We are so developed and intelligent as a species that this actually restricts us from tapping into our innate, natural, mammalian abilities. We all have the capability to know what our own baby needs, and you can promote this instinctual ability by allowing oxytocin to be released naturally, during labour, delivery, golden hour, and the fourth trimester.

Keep The Oxytocin Flowing

Let's talk about the ways you can encourage that flow of natural oxytocin to maximize your ability to tap into your inborn maternal intuition.

Very important, gradual psychological and physiological adaptations occur during labour and vaginal birth that depend on a mother's own natural oxytocin to be released into circulation. Oxytocin helps contract the uterus while also relaxing the cervix to allow the baby to pass through, much like it contracts our milk making cells, and relaxes the ducts to allow milk to flow more freely.

Labour can be a really exciting time, it may even trigger some anxiety surrounding the unknown and meeting our little one. The best thing we can do during the start and progression of labour to prevent the release of cortisol and adrenaline is to maintain a calm and peaceful ambiance. Making sure we are doing lots of research and surrounding ourselves with positive birth stories and experiences leading up to this time is essential for preparing for a peaceful birth. Taking birth classes and even hiring a birth doula could be just the ticket to assist you in feeling confident and prepared for labour, birth, and breastfeeding.

Once Labour Begins

Once labour begins, you and your partner should begin to monitor contractions, try to minimize stress levels, while staying home as long as possible! As birth is one of the only positive times we really associate going to the hospital, for many, even just being in the sterile hospital environment can trigger stress and slow down labour. Being wherever you feel most calm & comfortable is important. If that place is the hospital, then do that! You may find that the presence and support of a birth doula to be a comforting resource for navigating labouring at home as long as you are able and also show you pain coping strategies to do at home with either them or your partner. I highly suggest doula support for anyone who is nervous to birth or if hospitals make you uneasy.



Upon determining that it's time to move labour to the hospital, you can continue to increase oxytocin production by maintaining a peaceful ambiance, have your partner take care of paperwork at check in while you focus on your breath and keeping relaxed. Having only essential and supportive people with you during your labour and birth will help keep the vibes in check.

Set the Stage

Dim the lights in your room once you have settled in, allow yourself to laugh and have fun, let your partner soothe you by offering comfort measures, gentle touch, and kiss.

Move your body; dance, sway, walk, cuddle! Avoid unnecessary medical intervention or drugs if you can as they can inhibit the flow of good labour hormones & release of oxytocin following labour, making contractions more difficult to cope with



once they wear off. The goal is to allow your body to feel and work through each contraction, allowing your hormones to catch up and relieve pain with bursts of natural oxytocin & endorphins. As your labour progresses, you will feel your baby move down the birth canal, your body will tell you when its time to push. We want to avoid accepting guided pushing from the hospital staff is possible as this could result in some other complications. It is important to note, that if you are accepting pain alleviation through medical intervention, you may require guided pushing as you may lose feeling of your contractions.

C-Section & Oxytocin



There are absolutely situations during which a c-section can be a necessary and life saving procedure. We are lucky to live in a time and country where we have the access to this type of medical care in professional, clean settings. It's important though, to understand that this is a major surgery and requires extensive recovery and presents parents with additional challenges during the postpartum period and child feeding experience. In North America, C-sections sit at over 30% of all births. This is 20% higher than what is deemed appropriate by the WHO.

During a c-section the amount of oxytocin that is released depends on how long the mother is having contractions prior to the surgery. In the case of elective c section where the mother doesn't go into labour, there is no oxytocin being released as there aren't any contractions actively taking place.

Golden Hour

The Golden Hour is defined as the first hour after the occurrence of birth, it is considered the most integral factor in success of a mother's breastfeeding journey, bonding with her infant, and reducing stress for both baby and mom through skin to skin and oxytocin release. You and your babe have just gone through one heck of an experience. You're both tired and need a moment to soak each other in. There tends to be this rush around getting the baby cleaned up, weighed, measured etc. This is all great and necessary, but it can wait. First and foremost we are taking full advantage of skin to skin time during golden hour with your little one, if you can take two hours that's even better. Then dad can accompany baby to be seen by the nurses to do all the weigh ins and check ups. Once this is done, dad can have his turn doing skin to skin with baby!

Following birth and during the golden hour we can increase release of oxytocin by doing as much skin to skin with your little as possible. Avoid too many visitors in the hospital if you can, as well as when you are home for the first while, it can tend to be a little overwhelming. I do encourage you, though, to accept help from your immediate support system around the house with things like cooking, cleaning, laundry so you can focus on connecting with your little, healing up, & breastfeeding around the clock.

Golden Hour Cont.

The fourth trimester is all about skin to skin snuggles, relaxing, healing, connecting (with your partner and baby as a new family unit) and loads of eye contact. All of these things will have positive immediate and long term affects on your baby.

Some of the benefits of oxytocin release in the golden hour and fourth trimester are:

- temperature regulation for your baby

- temperature synchronization with mom & baby via skin to skin

- less crying

- triggers baby to seek out breast instinctually

Oxytocin is triggered while breastfeeding. When a baby suckles at the mothers teat, nerves are stimulated in the nipple and oxytocin flow is triggered. Oxytocin assists in milk ejection (let down) and also “the giving of warmth, oxytocin works similarly in these two scenarios; it stimulates our milk making cells causing them to contract and push out milk through the ducts and out our our nipple pores, while contracting the milk cells it is also relaxing the ducts to allow for milk to pass more freely through.

The giving of warmth is the phenomenon that causes increase in skin temperature on in our breast/chest area to help regulate baby’s temperature. The giving of warmth works similarly to the milk ejection reflex in that oxytocin dilates blood vessels to allow blood to easily pass through, in tern raising temperature in that area.

Inhibiting Natural Release of Oxytocin

Now that we have discussed how oxytocin can be naturally released, let's go over the way it can be inhibited. We know that unfamiliar and scary situations and places can trigger stress and adrenaline hormones (fight or flight response in our body), which have a negative affect on releasing oxytocin. Another way oxytocin release is inhibited is through unnecessary medical intervention and administering of pain medications. In Canada, when it comes to pain intervention in the hospital most commonly we are offered laughing gas (nitrous oxide), morphine, fentanyl, and the Epidural. Narcotics such as morphine and fentanyl have a short life (last about 15 minutes) and do not fully elevate pain, they need to be frequently re-administered to maintain the feeling of cutting the edge off. These narcotics do enter babies bloodstream and can cause them to be sleepy, delay breastfeeding initiation which can impact the success of breastfeeding, and impact release of oxytocin for mother and baby amongst other things. It is important to understand and use these tools appropriately, and not in excess to prevent further intervention. Epidurals have the highest likelihood to relieve pain completely, but even this method is not sure fire, and largely depends on the skill of the person administering it as it is injected right into the spine. Some are completely relieved of pain, some are only relieved on half of their body, some not at all. Epidurals are responsible for inhibiting oxytocin flow during labour which can result in a longer labour.

Inhibiting Natural Release of Oxytocin

Nitrous oxide is one of the pain alleviation offered that does not pass through to the baby and doesn't affect oxytocin release during or after labour.

Pitocin (synthetic oxytocin) may be administered because labour is slow to progress and either the mother or the doctor want to speed things up. Another reason it may be administered is because one perhaps an epidural was used (which slows labour down and now doc wants to pick it back up synthetically). The use of Pitocin is related to delaying release of your natural oxytocin once the Pitocin wears off. Another thing to note is that when Pitocin and other medications to relieve pain are administered, uterine contraction become very painful and difficult to deal with once they wear off due to the delayed or inhibited release of natural oxytocin. When we think about it like this its easy to see how many moms get trapped in a cycle of needing constant intervention once intervention has began, as a waterfall of events can take place to due messing with the natural progression of birth.



Final Thoughts

Birth is designed to work so that you could do it on your own, in a forrest, without help. We are so lucky to have modern medicine and sterile places to birth our babies, especially for those who are high risk.

Though, it's important to remember to trust your body to do what it was literally designed to do. You knew how to conceive your baby without being told how to, your body knew how to build it from a tiny cell, and trust me, you know how to birth and feed that baby once it comes. It does take village and the more support the better, but trust yourself and your body, you so got this!

