

Oxytocin: To Help Start or Speed Up Your Labour

Patient Guidebook

Kingston Health
Sciences Centre

Centre des sciences de
la santé de Kingston



Hôpital
Hotel Dieu
Hospital



Hôpital Général de
Kingston General
Hospital

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Introduction

What is oxytocin?

Oxytocin is a hormone that is produced naturally. It helps your uterus to contract enough for labour. Contractions are needed to open the lower part of your uterus, which is called the cervix. Your cervix has to open fully for you to give birth vaginally.

If stronger contractions are needed to make your birth come more quickly, your health care provider may recommend a medication which is similar to the natural hormone you would produce.

Why is oxytocin used?

For most women, labour begins on its own. For some women, it may be medically necessary to have an induction (to help start labour) or augmentation (to speed up labour). Your healthcare provider may recommend different options for this. One of the ways an induction or augmentation can be done is with a medication called oxytocin. It is important to have all the information you need to make the best decision for you and your baby.

How would I benefit from oxytocin?

How would I benefit from an induction with oxytocin?

An induction is recommended when a health problem makes continuing pregnancy more risky. Giving oxytocin is one of several ways that your healthcare provider may offer you to make your labour start.

Labour is usually induced for valid medical reasons. There may be other reasons why you are offered an induction with oxytocin. You and your healthcare provider will discuss your specific needs and treatment plan.

Reasons you may be offered an induction of labour:

- You have gone more than a week or two past your due date.
- Your baby is not growing well or baby movements have slowed down.
- Your water has broken and labour has not started.
- You have an infection.
- You have a medical illness like high blood pressure, diabetes, kidney disease or heart problems.
- You have a problem with your placenta.

How would I benefit from an augmentation with oxytocin?

Oxytocin may be recommended if your labour slows down or your contractions are not strong or frequent enough to allow your cervix to open. Oxytocin can help make your contractions stronger and closer together.

What are the risks?

What are the risks of oxytocin?

For safety, an induction or augmentation of labour with oxytocin needs to happen in hospital, on our labour and delivery ward. Your healthcare provider will begin with a low dose of oxytocin and will monitor you and your baby closely. Some women need more time with oxytocin than others. Decisions about your care will be based on how your body reacts to the oxytocin.

Some of the risks include:

- Your uterus contracts too frequently or too strongly. This may cause changes in your baby's heart rate. If this happens, the oxytocin may be reduced or stopped to ensure that you and your baby are okay. The oxytocin may be restarted at a later time.
- If your body doesn't respond to oxytocin as expected, or if you or your baby show concerning signs, you and your healthcare

provider will have a discussion about the safest plan of care for you and your baby.

What can I expect to happen if I am given oxytocin?

What should I expect during my labour?

You will receive oxytocin through an intravenous (IV). Oxytocin will begin with a low dose and will gradually be increased until your contractions are strong and close together.

You will be attached to a continuous electronic fetal monitor (EFM) which constantly checks your contractions and your baby's heart rate. The monitor may be removed for up to 30 minutes if you and your baby are okay and the oxytocin rate is not going up or down.

Your healthcare provider may also break your water to help start or speed up your labour.

You will receive close care by a nurse.

You will have regular vaginal exams to check if your cervix is opening. In the beginning of your labour, it is normal for your cervix to be slow to change.

Some women experience more pain when given oxytocin. You and your healthcare provider will discuss all of the pain management options available to you,

and decide on a pain relief method that is best for you and your baby.

Information and Notes

Some questions I have for my healthcare provider:

1.

2.

3.

My due date: _____

Possible date of induction: _____

Who to call: Labour and Delivery Charge Nurse

Labour and Delivery Unit phone #: 613-548-2315

Where to go: Kingston Health Sciences Centre, KGH site, Connell 5 Labour and Delivery Unit

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