What You Need to Know about Oxytocin to Start or Advance Labour

Oxytocin is a hormone that is produced naturally by the body during labour to make the uterus contract. It is also available as a medication that can be given to start or speed up labour. The “Oxytocin to Start or Advance Labour: 5 Questions to Ask” handout is now available. It describes the benefits and risks of oxytocin and can help pregnant individuals and their support person have conversations with their health care team.

SafeMedicationUse.ca received a report from a person who was given oxytocin without their knowledge. After being in labour for more than 12 hours, they asked for an epidural to help with pain relief and sleep. Upon waking up later, they noticed that the nurse was adding oxytocin into the IV line. The medication caused the baby to become distressed, and a cesarean section was required.

SafeMedicationUse.ca has the following tips for expectant parents:

- **Read through “Oxytocin to Start or Advance Labour: 5 Questions to Ask” handout** to learn more about this medication. (www.ismp-canada.org/download/Oxytocin-Questions-EN.pdf)
- **Talk to your doctor and/or midwife** before the expected delivery about the benefits and risks of, as well as the need for, oxytocin. Continue to ask questions if anything is unclear, including during the delivery.
- **Learn how you and your baby will be monitored.** Your contractions, blood pressure, and heart rate will be checked regularly. The baby’s heart rate will also be closely followed if you receive oxytocin.

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**Oxytocin to Start or Advance Labour: 5 Questions to Ask**

1. **What is oxytocin?**

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2. **Why is it used and what are the benefits?**

   - To help start labour (induction), or
   - To help advance labour (augmentation) when the time between contractions is too long, the length of contractions is too short, or the contractions are too weak.
   - It may also be used to help the uterus contract after birth.

3. **Proper Use: How is it given?**

   Oxytocin is a hormone that is produced naturally by the body during pregnancy to make the uterus contract. It is also available as a medication that can be given to start or speed up labour. The “Oxytocin to Start or Advance Labour: 5 Questions to Ask” handout is now available. It describes the benefits and risks of oxytocin and can help pregnant individuals and their support person have conversations with their health care team.

4. **What are the risks?**

   Your baby and your baby will vary depending on your past or current health history (e.g., heart condition, diabetes).

   - **Red flag that they may include.**
     - Fetal heart rate changes
     - Fetal distress
     - Increased labour pain
     - Heavy bleeding
     - Postpartum bleeding
     - Other options may include waiting for labour to start, having a C-section, or using other medications, such as synthetic oxytocin, to help with the delivery.

5. **Monitor: What do I watch for?**

   - For more information about induction of labour visit: www.pregnancyinfo.ca/birth/labour/induction/