

QUEEN OXYTOCIN, RULER OF BIRTH – WHEREFORE ART THOU?

Previously Published in THE NATURAL PARENT MAGAZINE – February 2018

Dear Natural Parent Reader,

I'm making some assumptions about you, in particular about you and birth. I'm assuming you are what I call a 'willing woman', that is a woman who still has a yearning for normal physiological birth, a yearning to work with your body, your baby and the powerful building intensity of birthing energy. A birth directed by the evolutionarily honed hormonal dance between you and your baby. A birth that honours your baby's readiness, autonomy and timing. You're ready to surrender to patiently waiting on your baby's call for the labour to begin; to surrender to the evolutionary regression, triggered by your hormones, that then facilitates the shift in consciousness required for the deep instinctive connection with your body and baby to unfold.

I'm sure you know about 'queen oxytocin' – the love hormone; tend and befriend hormone; empathy hormone, the orchestrator of the loving vibe in the birth space hormone – the multi-tasking hormone that drives contractions to open your body and who at the same time, works magic to open your heart to your baby. She has a major role in normal physiological birth, bonding and breastfeeding and that's not even mentioning her role in on-going loving, empathetic attunement throughout life. Bow down before her in gratefulness for the richness she offers our human experience.

Now given 'queen oxytocin's' importance to loving connections within our families and close relationships, and her role in promoting empathy and harmonious feelings within our wider social and cultural settings, you would assume that we would protect her. That we would honour and protect her transmission from mother to baby during birth – the evolutionary pathway of primary transmission.

Well no, we are not honouring or protecting her at all, in fact we are almost wiping her out! Let's look at the Australian statistics to get a sense of the assault on 'queen oxytocin'.

At present only 50% of babies get to call the shots in the timing of their birth and through the dance of hormones (predominantly oxytocin) with their mother start the labour spontaneously. So at least these babies get a touch of oxytocin exchange. However, of this 50% of babies who start labour spontaneously, 34% of these labours will go on to be augmented (speeded up) with synthetic oxytocin.

Just a little word on synthetic oxytocin. Synthetic oxytocin is not a multitasking queen like natural oxytocin, synthetic oxytocin only drives the contractions to open your body. Not only that, but once synthetic oxytocin enters the picture it cancels out queen oxytocin and her magic legacy.

Now also 29% of births are induced from scratch using only synthetic oxytocin, so neither mum or baby get queen oxytocin's buzz. Neither do the 21% of babies born by elective caesarean. Not looking good for queen oxytocin and we're not finished yet, because we then have 95-99% of births where the delivery of the placenta is managed by synthetic oxytocin.

We are definitely not honouring or protecting the generational exchange of oxytocin from mother to baby. What will this mean down the generations? Well oxytocin researcher



Professor of Physiology Kerstin Moberg, alerts us to the worrying possibility that, *if a mother transfers her 'oxytocin competence' to her baby, her baby is likely to transfer it to her baby, and so forth. This means that a reduced 'oxytocin competence' may also be transferred to the next generation. What happens after ten, a hundred, or one thousand generations?*

It's very, very concerning.

So dear 'willing woman' what are you to do to protect and honour queen oxytocin's sweet role in birth and in that delicious bonding with your baby as a foundation for your ongoing empathetic attunement?

Well there are at least two key things. One is to be aware, particularly in late pregnancy, of surrendering to your body and your baby's needs and rhythms so that your oxytocin system is primed; indulge in sweet loving exchanges of one type or another to boost your oxytocin levels and develop relaxation skills to deal with any stress in order to keep adrenaline and cortisol out of your system. Adrenaline and cortisol will swamp your oxytocin system, compromising your capacity to go into labour spontaneously.

Secondly, you need to be very savvy about your birth choices to protect and honour queen oxytocin. Savvy about your care-givers and savvy about where you will give birth. Are you working with care-givers who support and promote normal physiological birth and so know how to enhance your oxytocin system? Or are you working with care-givers who work within a more medically dominated framework where synthetic oxytocin is more likely to control the labour and birth? Will the birth space offer you emotional and territorial safety? Emotional and territorial safety is required to support queen oxytocin, for although she is so important she is also known as the 'shy hormone' and will not come out to weave her magic in situations where you feel unsafe or under threat – adrenaline will run that show with big consequences to your labour, stalling it or stopping it altogether. Then synthetic oxytocin might need to be enlisted to complete the task.

Let's think about emotional and territorial safety for a moment. Emotional safety of course is the safety, the soothing sense of emotional security, that you hopefully feel with the people surrounding you at the birth. This is because your sense of emotional security will enhance your oxytocin system and therefore the efficiency of the labour and birth. Research tells us that, as well as being supported by the key people from your life that you choose to have with you for the labour and birth of your sweet baby, the potential for normal physiological birth is greatly enhanced when you work with midwives in continuity of care programs. (Sadly, in Australia only 8% of women get to access these programs). It's all about emotional security.

Then there's territorial safety, the safety of the birth space – feeling safe, private and undisturbed in a 'sanctum' style birth space – warmth, dim lights, access to water immersion – your sacred birth space.

Unfortunately, in the present birth culture it's all designed around medical safety and 'surveillance' rooms, which so often triggers adrenaline and trashes what's needed for oxytocin flow. No wonder we see so little queen oxytocin in all her majesty.

We need to honour and protect queen oxytocin, our children, grandchildren and great, great grandchildren are counting on us.

