Review Article

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The Impact of Natural and Synthetic Oxytocin in the Transition to Motherhood: Beyond Labor

Abstract

Endogenous oxytocin plays a significant role in the adjustment to motherhood by influencing the molecular pathways that reduce the responsiveness to stress, promote happiness, and control appropriate maternal behaviours (including lactation). In contemporary obstetrics, synthetic oxytocin is frequently utilized throughout labor and after care. However, there is little data on the effects of mother exposure to prenatal synthetic oxytocin outside of labor. In this article, we examine the molecular mechanisms of oxytocin, the behaviours connected to becoming a mother, and the evidence for the need for additional study on the possible impacts of intrapartum oxytocin outside of labor. We provide a molecular introduction to oxytocin.

Keywords: Endogenous oxytocin • Maternal behaviours • Prenatal synthetic oxytocin • Intrapartum oxytocin

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Introduction

Understudied are the effects of normal birthing treatments on human maternal behaviour. In the United States, synthetic oxytocin is frequently used for labour induction, augmentation, and third stage management. It promotes uterine smooth muscle contractility. The biochemical and behavioural implications of synthetic oxytocin outside of its immediate clinical usage are little unclear, despite the fact that its careful administration has several advantages. According to the Vital Statistics report from the US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, the rate of induction more than doubled between 1990 and 2010 (from 10% to 23%).1 The best estimate of the augmentation rate in the United States at this time is 57%.2 While endogenous oxytocin is well known for its function in labour and breastfeeding, a substantial amount of research demonstrates that oxytocin also functions in a variety of other molecular and endocrine pathways [1].

Oxytocin in transition to motherhood

It takes a lot of physical and social engagement to give birth and become a mother, especially for the first time. The survival of the family and species depends on the ability of the mother to interact synchronously with her newborn and provide for their needs. Financial pressures, work commitments, social isolation or lack of support and sociocultural ideals of "good" mothering can all affect modern parenting. In this situation, a challenging transition to motherhood carries the risk of causing deregulated stress reactivity, mood disorders, susceptibility to less sensitive mothering, asynchronous mother-infant connection, and poor infant attachment [2].

Maternal mood

A well-regulated oxytocin system is anxiolytic and offers defence against depressive mood, just like with stress reactivity. Synthetic oxytocin administered intranasally has been demonstrated in numerous studies to have anxiolytic effects on psychiatric diseases.It is more challenging to assess if intrapartum synthetic oxytocin confers the same protective role as endogenous oxytocin on maternal mental health, particularly in light of the complexity of modern birth techniques. Up to 19% of women are thought to experience postpartum maternal depression. Women who are unhappy are less likely to exhibit good parenting skills and are less sensitive to the needs of their children. A mother's outcome may be predicted by both subjective and objective birth variables, such as complications, mode of delivery, increased use of interventions, and maternal perception of the experience, in addition to the well-known predictors of

postpartum depression and anxiety, such as poor social support, stressful or adverse life events, and a history of depression or anxiety. Little is understood about the molecular mechanisms that link birth-related factors to postpartum mood, and the precise impact of exposure to synthetic oxytocin has not been dissected. Synthetic oxytocin use is frequently linked to pre-existing problems, but it can also trigger a chain reaction of procedures and further birth issues even in low-risk circumstances [3].

Mothering behaviour

Numerous nonhuman species have provided evidence for the mediation of endogenous oxytocin in the onset of maternal behaviour. Strong evidence of later problematic parental behaviours is shown by animal studies that manipulate the oxytocin system during perinatal development. Oxytocin, for example, unmistakably mediates the onset of maternal behaviour in rats. However, a central infusion of synthetic oxytocin can encourage mother acceptance of foreign lambs. In ewes, maternal acceptance of their own lamb occurs following identification [4, 5]. When regional anesthesia after physiologic birth prevents the release of central oxytocin and the resultant lack of vagino cervical stimulation, optimal mother behaviour in ewes and heifers is inhibited. An oxytocin antagonist or a central infusion of synthetic oxytocin can change a nonhuman primate's ideal mother behaviour. A growing corpus of research points to a connection between oxytocin and ideal maternal behaviours in humans. Affectionate touch, eye-to-eye contact, good affect, and affectionate language are examples of optimal mothering behaviours that are characterized by sensitivity to newborn cues and synchronous mother-infant connection. Infant affective states are significantly influenced by the synchronicity of mother-infant connection. A number of studies have discovered a link between abnormal peripheral oxytocin levels and subpar maternal behaviour. The OTR gene's lower central binding and genetic variation have both been linked to less ideal maternal behaviour. Two unique brain-behavior-oxytocin patterns were discovered in mothers who displayed synchronous versus invasive mothering behaviour in a recent fMRI research of 15 parent-infant dyads [6, 7].

Consequences for offspring

Animal studies of offspring exposed to oxytocin manipulations in early life have frequently shown evidence for long-term detrimental effects on social behaviour and the management of stressful events [8]. For instance, research in pigs showed that early exposure to intranasal oxytocin resulted in abnormal, nonreciprocal social behaviour as well as a changed ability to react to stressful situations in later life.57 The idea that exposure to synthetic oxytocin, especially at high doses, during the perinatal period can have an impact on the offspring is also supported by numerous rodent studies [9, 10].

Conclusion

The neuroendocrine hormone oxytocin has complicated physiological effects throughout the body and is essential for the mother-infant dyad as well as social wellbeing. Although there is still much to learn about how oxytocin affects the transition to motherhood, new research in both animal and human models emphasizes the need for a deeper comprehension of how physiologic birth affects mother-infant biobehavioral outcomes that are crucial to the fields of midwifery and obstetrics. It is clear that oxytocin has a wide range of functions in the body, ranging from molecular cell systems with possible long-term effects to uterine contractility. In the context of postpartum care, the downstream molecular consequences of both naturally produced and synthesized oxytocin have not been adequately studied.

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