

Oxytocin ^[1]

Dear Alice,

What is oxytocin and does your body produce it during masturbation? I heard you can buy it, but if you do, does that mean you are going to start producing milk at random times for women?

Answer

Dear Reader,

Affectionately known as the "cuddle hormone," "trust hormone," and "love hormone," oxytocin is thought to be involved in bonding and social recognition, as well as the formation of trust. Pharmaceutical companies produce synthetic forms of oxytocin, administered through injections and nasal sprays; however, you can't buy synthetic oxytocin — health care providers only prescribe it for medical purposes and in a setting where the patient can be carefully monitored for side effects. While oxytocin may still be a mysterious phenomenon to some, the following information may help you feel the love!

Oxytocin is naturally produced in the hypothalamus and released from the pituitary gland during hugging, touching, and orgasm. In fact, human blood concentrations of oxytocin have been reported to be higher amongst people who claim to be falling in love. Solo sexperts, don't feel left out — oxytocin levels peak during an orgasm, whether with a partner or during masturbation. It is also theorized that oxytocin affects generosity through increased empathy, reduces addiction to drugs and eases withdrawal symptoms, and contributes to learning and memory functions.

Oxytocin also plays an important role in breastfeeding, where it enables milk to be secreted from the nipple in lactating women. However, even if oxytocin is administered, women will not begin to lactate without the presence of a second hormone, prolactin. During childbirth, oxytocin is released in large amounts to stimulate contractions, or the dilation of the cervix. Physicians can administer oxytocin to induce contractions when a woman's cervix needs some extra help dilating during labor. Moreover, it is thought that oxytocin promotes maternal behavior, such as nurturing and caring.

Clearly, oxytocin is quite an important and multi-purpose hormone. Although you may not be able to directly measure your own oxytocin levels, it is likely that they fluctuate during different social

encounters and experiences without you even knowing it. Here's to the big O — oxytocin, that is!

Alice!

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