



Oxytocin Nasal Spray

Oxytocin is a hormone that causes muscles around the milk glands to squeeze milk into the ducts, a process called “let-down.”

What is oxytocin?

Oxytocin is a hormone that makes smooth muscles contract. It also works in the brain to help with bonding and feelings of love and caring for others.

During breastfeeding, nerves in the nipple carry a message to the brain to release oxytocin from the pituitary gland every time the baby sucks. Oxytocin causes muscles around the milk glands to squeeze milk into the ducts. When this “let-down” happens, some women feel “pins and needles” or a tingling sensation in the breasts. Sometimes milk drips from your other breast. Sometimes you feel thirsty.

Oxytocin also makes the uterus contract, so in the first week after birth, you might feel menstrual-like cramps or an increase in your *lochia* flow. *Lochia* is the fluid that leaves the vagina after childbirth. It is mostly blood.

When is oxytocin nasal spray needed?

Oxytocin nasal spray is a synthetic form of the hormone. If your breasts are so full and firm that nursing, massage, warmth, and pumping cannot relieve the pressure after 24 hours, oxytocin nasal spray may help. It can also boost milk supply by helping to empty the breasts more completely.

Where do I get it?

You will need a prescription for oxytocin. Your obstetrician, midwife, primary care provider, or nurse practitioner can write a prescription for you. Oxytocin nasal spray is prepared in the pharmacy at University of Washington Medical Center (UWMC) and in some drugstore pharmacies. Not all drugstores carry it.

Questions?

Call 206-598-4628

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or health care provider if you have questions or concerns. UWMC clinic staff are also available to help.

Lactation Services:
206-598-4628

Weekdays:
9 a.m. to 9 p.m.

Weekends and holidays:
9 a.m. to 1 p.m.

What is the dose?

UWMC’s pharmacy prepares oxytocin in a 5 ml nasal spray bottle. The concentration is 10 units/ml. The original “Syntocinon” was 40 units/ml. This stronger dose can be made by a *compounding* pharmacist. Some local compounding pharmacies are:

- Maple Leaf (206-729-7514)
- Kelly Ross (206-622-3565)
- Lloyd Center (800-358-8974)
- Belgrove (425-455-2123)

How do I take it?

- Because oxytocin is not absorbed by the body when it is taken by mouth, you must take it as nasal spray. Begin with 1 or 2 sprays in each nostril before breastfeeding or pumping.
- You can spray each nostril again every few minutes as needed while you breastfeed or pump.
- If you do not like the spray method, you can drip oxytocin into your nostril with your head tipped backward (1 drop = 1 spray). You can also spray the back of your throat or under your tongue, although the enzymes in your saliva may make it less effective.

Are there any side effects?

Some women get headaches when they use oxytocin. Stopping oxytocin will make the headaches go away.

To Learn More

Medications and Mothers’ Milk, by Thomas W. Hale (2008).