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[Low oxytocin levels and symptoms of post-partum depression](#)

DOI: 10.1038/NPP.2011.74

Low pre-partal levels of the hormone oxytocin could be linked to the development of post-partum
depression (PPD), according to a new prospective study published online this week in
Neuropsychopharmacology. Further understanding of this mechanism could help lead to
preventative treatments for this condition.

PPD affects up to one fifth of new mothers and can have devastating consequences for
both mother and child, but little is known about its causes. Gunther Meinlschmidt and colleagues

tested the association between symptoms of PPD and oxytocin, which is involved in adjustment to pregnancy, delivery, breast milk production, and mother-infant bonding. After analyzing blood samples from 74 healthy pregnant women, the authors found that lower oxytocin levels in the third trimester were associated with increased risk of developing PPD within two weeks after giving birth.

These preliminary findings appear to support previous research linking oxytocin with depression and stress responses, but future studies are needed to verify a causal relationship.

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