

The Brain That Bonds



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Giving birth is a magical time and once it is over, you have a mother and a baby that have been coexisting for the last nine months now having to find a whole new way to relate to each other. One way to understand this new found relationship is to describe it as maternal instinct taking over.

But in reality it is much more than an instinct. It is an actual change in how the female brain responds to the release of the hormonal neurotransmitter, **oxytocin**.

Just prior to birth oxytocin surging throughout the body as it acts to expand the vagina and cervix as contractions begin. Then directly thereafter, oxytocin begins stimulating milk for breastfeeding. Besides breastfeeding providing the baby with a healthier immune system it also **creates a deeper bonding experience between mother and infant**.

There also is an oxytocin relationship with other skin-to-skin contact. **Mothers who have just given birth appear to**

thermoregulate the skin surface of their chest area. When a baby is nestled against a mother's chest her body temperature will increase by a degree or two if the baby's body temperature drops or decreases if the baby's body temperature rises.

Researcher Ruth Feldman and colleagues of Bar-Ilan University found a correlation between higher levels of oxytocin and breast milk formation but also the amount of time mothers and babies gazed at one another. **It is this gazing and facial recognition that ignites the maternal instinct to be protective and loving mother** and provides the reciprocal emotional bond with babies learning through imitation.

It seems that Mother Nature has thought of everything.

She provides oxytocin as a built-in wired maternal instinct that makes childbirth possible and starts the flow of a nurturing relationship between mother and newborn.

by Joyce Hansen