
A research-based look at the safety of breastfeeding during pregnancy

adapted from the book:

Adventures in Tandem Nursing: Breastfeeding During Pregnancy and Beyond (© 2003, LLLI)
by Hilary Flower

Does breastfeeding trigger preterm labor or miscarriage?

We cannot answer this question definitively at this point because we lack a large-scale medical study. One survey of 57 mothers by Sherrill Moscona revealed that breastfeeding resulted in no apparent adverse consequences to the mothers' pregnancies, and a great deal of anecdotal evidence agrees with this preliminary finding. The American Academy of Family Physicians states that "If the pregnancy is normal and the mother is healthy, breastfeeding during pregnancy is the woman's personal decision.

Breastfeeding and contractions

Breastfeeding releases oxytocin into the bloodstream. Oxytocin is the chemical messenger that tells the breast tissue to contract and eject milk (the milk ejection reflex). Oxytocin also tells the uterine tissue to contract. Thus during breastfeeding all women experience uterine contractions, although they are usually too mild to notice. Once labor is under way, the uterus is highly tuned into oxytocin. In this way, oxytocin plays an important role in labor.

ADVENTURES IN
TANDEM
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**Breastfeeding During
Pregnancy and Beyond**

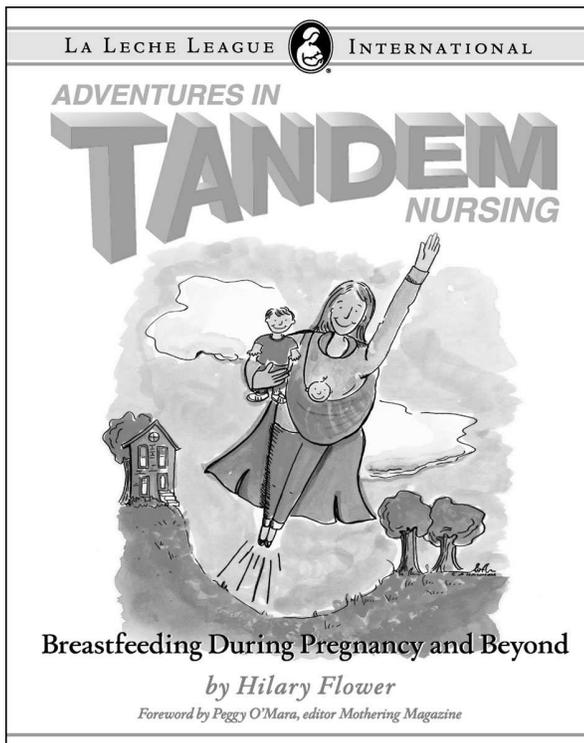
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Safeguards in effect through the first 38 weeks of healthy pregnancies

For the first 38 weeks of healthy pregnancies, the pregnant body has many safeguards in place to buffer the effects of oxytocin on the uterus. During pregnancy less oxytocin is released in response to nipple stimulation than before or after pregnancy. But even a high dose of synthetic oxytocin (Pitocin) in the preterm period is unlikely to trigger labor. What makes the uterus relatively insensitive to oxytocin for most of pregnancy?

1. The uterine cells that detect the presence of oxytocin (oxytocin receptor sites) are **sparse** until the mother is at term. The biggest proliferation occurs after labor is already underway.
2. The oxytocin receptor sites are ineffective for most of pregnancy because they lack critical helper agents called gap junction proteins. This state is called **down-regulated**. Until these gap junction proteins arrive labor will not commence.
3. **Oxytocin-blockers** are in effect for most of pregnancy. Progesterone is one of the big ones. It binds directly to the oxytocin receptor sites, getting between oxytocin and its receptor site until it is time to go into labor.

Medical research on the effects of oxytocin on the pregnant uterus gives us valid reasons to doubt that oxytocin released during breastfeeding could trigger miscarriage or preterm labor.



"Hilary Flower has provided a detailed explanation that is easily accessible to the lay person, as to why the normal pregnant uterus only responds weakly to the action of oxytocin hormone until the very end of pregnancy. Undoubtedly, this is one of nature's own safety checks to prevent miscarriage and preterm labour in women continuing to breastfeed regularly during their next pregnancy. I feel sure that this book will provide women with confidence and reassurance."

Lesley Regan, PhD, MD
Head of the Recurrent Miscarriage Clinic at St. Mary's Hospital in London, the largest miscarriage referral unit in Europe, and author of *Miscarriage: What every woman should know*

"*Adventures in Tandem Nursing* is a rare gem... a book that reassures, informs, and entertains simultaneously. We in the lactation community have been waiting for this book for a very long time."

Diana West, IBCLC
author, *Defining Your Own Success: Breastfeeding After Breast Reduction Surgery*

Reviews

"For parents who decide that weaning can wait, a sometimes inevitable result is a new pregnancy while the toddler is still nursing. This new step in the adventure of parenting brings a new set of questions and challenges, and Flower's book provides an invaluable resource."

Norma Jane Bumgarner
author, *Mothering Your Nursing Toddler*

"Every page of Hilary Flower's book delights me! It's full of helpful information and personal support, both essential to breastfeeding success. And with tandem nursing, you need a double dose of both!"

Peggy O'Mara
editor, *Mothering*

"*Adventures In Tandem Nursing: Breastfeeding During Pregnancy And Beyond* by Hilary Flower is a comprehensive, definitive, 'reader friendly' instructional resource offering everything expectant mothers need to know about breastfeeding, including its pros and cons, dealing with discomforts, dealing with disapproval, adopting a second nursling, proper nutrition while breastfeeding, illustrative mothers' stories, and more. A solid, exhaustive, balanced, and readily accessible resource, *Adventures In Tandem Nursing* is very highly recommended reading..."

Midwest Book Review
Internet Bookwatch Volume 13, Number 9
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"Finally! This book is a fun-to-read combination of mother wisdom and hard scientific evidence on nursing during pregnancy and tandem nursing. This resource both supports and informs nursing mothers, while providing the research-based information on safety issues that they need. Mothers, lactation professionals and health care professionals will find this to be a valuable addition to their bookshelf."

Kelly Bonyata
kellymom.com

Ordering Information

Adventures in Tandem Nursing

can be ordered from
La Leche League International.

Additional information at NursingTwo.com

Item No. 1379-12

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