

# What Are the Side Effects of **Pitocin**<sup>®†</sup>?

(Pitocin is a synthetic version of the natural hormone known as oxytocin. It is also known as Syntocinon in the UK)

## Uses of Pitocin

Pitocin is used to either start a labor or speed labor if it is not progressing as fast as is expected by the care providers. According to Gabbe's Obstetrics, these are the medical reasons labor may need to be started or sped up:

- Preeclampsia
- Diabetes
- Kidney diseases
- Lung disease
- Water sac breaking‡
- Infection of the uterus
- Unborn baby is not doing well
- Baby is no longer alive
- Pregnancy that lasts longer than 42 weeks

## Reasons for Induction

Reasons a doctor might consider induction:

- High blood pressure (pre-existing)
- Systemic lupus erythematosus
- Gestational diabetes
- Some blood clotting problems
- Cholestasis of pregnancy
- Too much amniotic fluid
- Unborn baby has malformations
- Logistic factors (distance from hospital, fast labors, etc.)‡

## Effect on Labor

Some women report that labor with Pitocin is more painful than without it. This may be due to the fact that Pitocin is forcing the uterus to contract, instead

of allowing the body to do so on its own. For someone who is wanting to work through contractions without an epidural, the use of Pitocin may make this more difficult. However, many women have labored successfully after receiving Pitocin without an epidural.

\*American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists

## Risk Factors

- Increased chance of c-sections (especially in first time moms & those with unfavorable cervix)
- Longer hospital stays
- Increased costs for labor, pharmaceutical & postpartum care

## Common Side Effects

- Stronger Contractions (than without the use of Pitocin - thus leading to uterine rupture or oxygen deprivation for the baby)
- More painful contractions

## Medical Care Needed

A nurse should always be monitoring your baby's heart rate when using Pitocin. If she notices that your contractions are too close together, she may turn the Pitocin down. She may also do this if your baby's heart rate starts dropping. Often times, this solves the problem. Other interventions that may be needed at this time include oxygen for mom, rolling mom to the left side, or encouraging a different laboring position.

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†PLEASE NOTE: Pitocin<sup>®</sup> is a registered trademark of the PAR STERILE PRODUCTS, LLC as of the publication of this document. Information provided in this handout is exclusively for non-medical reference only. Always consult with your local medical provider for latest information on medical-based facts concerning Pitocin.  
‡Opinions vary; considered to be controversial.

References:  
*Obstetrics: Normal and Problem Pregnancies, 5th ed.* Gabbe et al.  
*Davis's Drug Guide for Nurses: Sixth edition,* Judith Hopfer Deglin and April Vallerand