1. The Hormonal Cascade of Childbearing

A new report, *Hormonal Physiology of Childbearing: Evidence and Implications for Women, Babies, and Maternity Care* (2015), synthesizes an extensive literature about hormonally-driven processes of parturition and the early postpartum period. The following information is drawn from this report.

Hormonal physiology of childbearing involves complex interconnected beneficial processes. Hormonal actions of one phase anticipate and prepare for subsequent phases. In healthy pregnancies, these processes foster efficient labor, safety for mother and infant, successful breastfeeding, and optimal mother-newborn bonding. The following graphic highlights key actions at each phase.

**LATE PREGNANCY AND EARLY LABOR**

Rise in hormone and receptor systems prepares for:
- Efficient labor and birth\(^1\)
- Efficient lactation and bonding/attachment (to date, in animal studies)\(^2\)
- Fetal well-being in labor and newborn transition\(^3\)

**ACTIVE LABOR**

Hormonal processes prepare for:
- Effective postpartum contractions and hemorrhage prevention\(^4\)
- Healthy newborn transition\(^3\)
- Breastfeeding and bonding (animals)\(^5\)

**BIRTH AND THE HOURS THAT FOLLOW**

Physiologic birth and skin-to-skin contact promote:
- Hormone release that may reduce hemorrhage risk\(^6\)
- Initiation of mother-newborn bonding\(^7\)
- Preparation for successful establishment of long-term breastfeeding\(^8\)

*Access* *Hormonal Physiology of Childbearing: Evidence and Implications for Women, Babies, and Maternity Care* (2015) by Dr. Sarah J. Buckley and related material, including individual fact sheets and the full set, at ChildbirthConnection.org/HormonalPhysiology.

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Selected references – see report for additional documentation:


Disclaimer: The information in this document is not intended as a substitute for the professional guidance of qualified maternity care providers.