Prevention and initial management of postpartum haemorrhage

Rational use of uterotonic drugs during labour and childbirth
Editors
Prevention of postpartum hemorrhage initiative (POPHI)

POPHI Contacts
For more information or additional copies of this brochure, please contact:
Deborah Armbruster, Project Director
PATH
1800 K St., NW, Suite 800
Washington, DC 20006
Tel: 202.822.0033

Susheela M. Engelbrecht
Senior Program Officer, PATH
PO Box 70241 Overport Durban 4067
Tel: 27.31.2087579, Fax: 27.31.2087549
sengelbrecht@path.org

www.pphprevention.org

This manual is made possible through support provided to the POPPHI project by the Office of Health, Infectious Diseases and Nutrition, Bureau for Global Health, US Agency for International Development, under the terms of Subcontract No. 4-31-U-8954, under Contract No. GHS-I-00-03-00028. POPPHI is implemented by a collaborative effort between PATH, RTI International, and EngenderHealth.

Table of contents

Preface.................................................................................................................................................................3
Supportive care during labour and childbirth..................................................................................................4
Rational use of uterotonic drugs during labour................................................................................................5
Indications and precautions for augmentation of labour................................................................................6
Preparation for active management of the third stage of labour (AMTSL)......................................................7
Steps for AMTSL................................................................................................................................................8
Integration of AMTSL and essential newborn care (ENC).............................................................................9
Monitoring the woman and newborn during the first 6 hours postpartum................................................10
Review of uterotonic drugs used for AMTSL...................................................................................................11
Storage of uterotonic drugs in the pharmacy.....................................................................................................12
Storage of uterotonic drugs in delivery rooms................................................................................................13
Immediate action in case of excessive bleeding after childbirth...................................................................14
Specific management for uterine atony after childbirth...............................................................................16

Copyright © 2009, Program for Appropriate Technology in Health (PATH). All rights reserved. The material in this document may be freely used for educational or noncommercial purposes, provided that the material is accompanied by an acknowledgement line.
Complications during pregnancy and childbirth are the most significant causes of death among women of reproductive health age. Less than one percent of these deaths occur in more developed countries, showing that the large majority of these deaths can be prevented if there are sufficient resources and health services available.

More than half of these maternal deaths occur in the first 24 hours after childbirth, and most of these deaths are due to postpartum haemorrhage. Postpartum haemorrhage (PPH) or excessive bleeding after childbirth is the single most important direct cause of maternal deaths in developing countries. Approximately 25 percent of all maternal deaths globally are due to haemorrhage; with percentages varying from less than 10 percent to almost 60 percent in different countries. A 2006 WHO systematic review found 34% of maternal deaths in Africa were due to hemorrhage (Khalid S. Khan, Daniel Wojdyla, Lale Say, A. Metin Gulmezoglu, Paul FA van Look, WHO analysis of causes of maternal death: a systematic review, Lancet 2006; 367:1066-74). Even if a woman survives a PPH, she could be severely anaemic and suffer chronic health problems. Where maternal mortality is high, and resources are limited, the introduction of active management of the third stage of labour (AMTSL), a feasible, low-cost, and evidence-based intervention to prevent PPH, can greatly improve survival of women and, consequently, their infants.

Figure 1. Global Data: Causes of Maternal Death

Other direct causes include ectopic pregnancy, embolism, anaesthesia-related
Indirect causes include: anaemia, malaria, heart disease, HIV/AIDS.

Skilled birth attendants are well placed to make a difference in maternal and newborn outcomes, to prevent PPH by providing quality midwifery care and applying AMTSL for all vaginal births, and to prevent death from PPH by responding quickly and appropriately when it occurs. Skilled birth attendants, let us fight together to make a difference—one woman, one birth, one newborn at a time…….

The components of AMTSL are: (1) Administration of a uterotonic drug within one minute after the baby is born (oxytocin is the uterotonic of choice), (2) Controlled cord traction (CCT) with counter traction to support the uterus; and (3) Uterine massage immediately after delivery of the placenta.

Supportive care during labour and childbirth


- Encourage the woman to have personal support from a person of her choice throughout labour and birth.
- Ensure mobility:
  - Encourage the woman to move about freely;
  - Support the woman’s choice of position for birth.
- Encourage the woman to empty her bladder regularly.
  **Note**: Do not routinely catheterize women in labour.
  **Note**: Do not routinely give an enema to women in labour.
- Encourage the woman to eat and drink as she wishes. If the woman has visible severe wasting or tires during labour, make sure she is fed. Nutritious liquid drinks are important, even in late labour.
- Help the woman in labour who is anxious, fearful or in pain:
  - Give her praise, encouragement and reassurance;
  - Give her information on the process and progress of her labour;
  - Listen to the woman and be sensitive to her feelings.
- If the woman is distressed by pain:
  - Suggest changes of position;
  - Encourage mobility;
  - Encourage her companion to massage her back or hold her hand and sponge her face between contractions;
  - Encourage breathing techniques;
  - Encourage warm bath or shower;
  - If necessary, give pethidine 1 mg/kg body weight (but not more than 100 mg) IM or IV slowly.

Monitor progress of first stage of labour using the partograph

Findings suggestive of **satisfactory progress** in first stage of labour are:

- regular contractions of progressively increasing frequency and duration;
- rate of cervical dilatation at least 1 cm per hour during the active phase of labour (cervical dilatation on or to the left of alert line);
- cervix well applied to the presenting part.

Findings suggestive of **unsatisfactory progress** in first stage of labour are:

- irregular and infrequent contractions after the latent phase;
- OR rate of cervical dilatation slower than 1 cm per hour during the active phase of labour (cervical dilatation to the right of alert line);
- OR cervix poorly applied to the presenting part.
**Rational use of uterotonic drugs during labour**

**Augmentation of labour**

Labour augmentation involves the stimulation of uterine contractions to produce delivery after the onset of spontaneous labour. Labour augmentation with uterotonic drugs is officially indicated when the skilled birth attendant diagnoses "hypotonic uterine dysfunction"—a condition in which the contractions of labour become ineffective at producing cervical dilation. Following this rationale, **labour augmentation should be contraindicated in normal labours**. Yet, although obstetric texts warn against its dangers, normal labours are commonly augmented throughout the world and the decision to augment labour is influenced by beliefs of individual health care providers as well as women in labour and their families.

---

**Unsatisfactory progress in labour is diagnosed when:**

- The latent phase is longer than 8 hours.
- Cervical dilatation is to the right of the alert line on the partograph.
- The woman has been experiencing labour pains for 12 hours or more without delivery (prolonged labour).

---

**Causes of unsatisfactory progress in labour**

If the woman is in true labour, consider the following possible causes:

- **Patient** – dehydration, anxiety, pain
- **Passenger** – malposition, malpresentation, macrosomia (big baby)
- **Passage** – pelvis or small tissue
- **Power** – uterine contractions (contractions too weak or too infrequent to cause cervical dilatation) or maternal expulsive efforts (inadequate uterine activity)

**Dangers of augmenting labour with uterotonic drugs (oxytocin or misoprostol)**

When labour is augmented with a uterotonic drug, the quality and quantity of uterine contractions are greatly affected. The contractions tend to be longer, stronger, and with shorter relaxation periods between. While augmentation with uterotonic drugs plays a major role in shortening labour, but there are grave risks associated with it, including:

- the increased pressure of the contractions can, and often does, compress the umbilical cord and cut down the baby's oxygen supply which may lead to foetal distress, asphyxia, and foetal death
- uterine rupture and abruptio placentae
- increased pain for the mother of the uterotonic-induced contractions is likely to increase her stress and anxiety levels
- oxytocin is a strong antidiuretic, even at low doses; its combination with the IV fluids can result in water intoxication
- uterine fatigue after childbirth which is associated with uterine atony and postpartum haemorrhage

---

**Misdiagnosing false labour or prolonged latent phase leads to unnecessary induction or augmentation, which may fail. This may lead to unnecessary caesarean operation and amnionitis.**
Indications and precautions for augmentation of labour

Indications for augmenting labour

Before making a decision to augment labour, the provider should make a careful assessment of the woman and foetus and evaluate the partograph.

If contractions are inefficient and false labour, cephalopelvic disproportion and obstruction have been excluded; the most probable cause of prolonged labour is inadequate uterine activity. When inadequate uterine activity is diagnosed (less than three contractions in 10 minutes, each lasting less than 40 seconds), the woman should be immediately transferred to a health care facility with an operating theatre and personnel that can prescribe and supervise augmentation of labour.

Labour should be augmented only after a thorough examination of the mother and foetus. A physician or skilled birth attendant should perform a cervical examination immediately prior to the initiation of oxytocin infusion or administration of misoprostol. Personnel who are familiar with the effects of uterotonics and who are able to identify both maternal and foetal complications should be present during administration.

Once labour augmentation has begun, the woman should never be left alone. Maternal vital signs, uterine contractions, and foetal heart rate should be monitored at least every 30 minutes to evaluate the effects of the uterotonic drug on labour progress, maternal condition, and foetal condition. The oxytocin drip rate should be adjusted based on labour progress, number of uterine contractions, and maternal and foetal condition.

A physician who can perform caesarean delivery should be readily available in the event that problems arise.

If unsatisfactory progress in labour is diagnosed:

- Make a rapid evaluation of the condition of the woman and fetus and provide supportive care.
- Test urine for ketones and treat with IV fluids if dehydrated.
- Review the partograph.
- Manage according to the cause of unsatisfactory progress in labour

Contraindications to augmentation of labour with uterotonic drugs

Labour augmentation with any uterotonic drug should never be attempted:

- When labour is progressing normally
- When there is cephalopelvic disproportion, transverse foetal lie, umbilical cord prolapse and the foetus is alive, multiple gestation, vasa praevia or complete placenta praevia, in a woman with previous caesarean operation
- In a facility without an operating theatre and a physician who can perform caesarean delivery
- In a facility without personnel to closely monitor the woman and baby
- In a facility without personnel who can identify both maternal and foetal complications during administration

Safety concerns

- Never administer oxytocin intramuscularly (IM) during labor.
- When 25 mcg tablets of misoprostol are not available, do not break higher dose tablets (usually 200 mcg) and administer for induction or augmentation.
Preparation for active management of the third stage of labour (AMTSL)


Prepare for birth and active management of the third stage of labour:

- Complete and review all of the woman’s medical records
- Prepare the delivery room:
  - Make sure that the woman’s bodily privacy is protected (curtains, doors that close, etc.); ask the woman if she would like a companion with her during childbirth and facilitate that person’s presence in the delivery room.
  - Check that all needed equipment and instruments for delivery care, essential maternal and newborn care, newborn resuscitation, and adult resuscitation are available, clean, sterile / HLD, in good working order, ready, and accessible.
  - Make sure that the room is warm (at least 25-28°C/77.0-82.4°F) and free from draughts from open windows and doors, or from fans.
  - Make sure that supplies needed to keep the newborn baby warm are prepared. Make sure that all surfaces the woman and baby will come in contact with are clean, warm, and dry.
  - Make sure the room is well lit.
- Make sure that all necessary equipment and supplies are available for infection prevention practices.
- Load the syringe with oxytocin 10 IU for administration with AMTSL.
- Help the woman empty her bladder when second stage is near (catheterize only if the woman cannot urinate and bladder is full).
- Assist the woman to assume the position of her choice (squatting, semi-sitting) and allow her to change position according to what’s most comfortable for her.
- Prepare the woman:
  - Encourage the woman to wash herself or bathe or shower at the onset of labour
  - Explain and offer AMTSL to the woman and obtain her permission to apply it.
  - Explain skin-to-skin contact and that the newborn will be placed first on her abdomen and then on her chest, and obtain her permission to do so.

Essential care for the newborn

Health care providers should follow these guidelines when caring for the newborn:

- Thoroughly dry and stimulate the baby while assessing breathing.
- Place the newborn in skin-to-skin contact with the woman; cover both with a dry warm cloth or blanket. Cover the baby’s head to ensure warmth.
- If breastfeeding is the woman’s choice for infant feeding, place the baby close to the woman’s breast to help encourage the baby to latch on to the breast.
- Wait to clamp and cut the cord until 2 to 3 minutes after the baby’s birth. (Even if oxytocin is given within one minute after birth of the baby, clamping does not need to happen until 2 to 3 minutes after the baby’s birth.)
Steps for AMTSL

1: Place the baby in skin-to-skin contact on the abdomen of the mother, dry the baby, assess the baby’s breathing and perform resuscitation if needed. Cover the woman and baby.

2: Administer a uterotonic (the uterotonic of choice is oxytocin 10 IU IM) immediately after birth of the baby, and after ruling out the presence of another baby.

3: Clamp and cut the cord after cord pulsations have ceased or approximately 2-3 minutes after birth of the baby, whichever comes first. Cover the cord with a piece of gauze when cutting the cord to avoid splashing of blood.

4: Place the infant directly on the mother’s chest, prone, with the newborn’s skin touching the mother’s skin. Cover the baby’s head with a cap or cloth. Cover the woman and baby.

5: Perform controlled cord traction while, at the same time, supporting the uterus by applying external pressure on the uterus in an upward direction towards the woman’s head.

6: Massage the uterus immediately after delivery of the placenta and membranes until it is firm.

During recovery, assist the woman to breastfeed if this is her choice, monitor the newborn and woman closely, palpate the uterus through the abdomen every 15 minutes for two hours to make sure it is firm and monitor the amount of vaginal bleeding. Provide PMTCT care as needed.
Integration of AMSTL and essential newborn care (ENC)

1) Keep required items for mother & baby close by, load oxytocin in syringe
2) Inform the woman what is being planned at her level of understanding

Place the baby in skin-to-skin contact on the abdomen of the mother, dry the baby, assess the baby’s breathing, discard the wet linen

**Baby crying well**
- Cover the baby with a dry cloth
- Cover the baby’s head, preferably with a hat
- Inform the mother about the baby
- Palpate the abdomen for a second baby

**Cry not heard**
- Call for help
- Assess breathing
- Stimulate baby while continuing to dry the baby
- Keep the baby warm: Cover the baby with a dry cloth; cover the baby’s head, preferably with a hat
- Inform the mother about the baby

**Breathing well**
- Administer oxytocin within 1 minute of the baby’s birth if presence of an additional baby has been ruled out

**Not breathing/gasping**
- Administer oxytocin within 1 minute of the baby’s birth if presence of an additional baby(s) has been ruled out

**Care for the baby**
- Cut the cord
- Carry out resuscitation for the baby

**Care for the woman**
- Perform controlled cord traction while, at the same time, performing countertraction to support the uterus

**Birth attendant alone?**
- No
- Yes

**Massage the uterus after delivery of the placenta**

Eye care; cord care; warmth (skin-to-skin contact); initiate breastfeeding

Monitoring + basic essential care for the woman and baby
Monitoring the woman during the first 6 hours postpartum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parameter</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Danger signs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vital signs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blood pressure</td>
<td>Every 15 minutes for 2 hours, then</td>
<td>Diastolic BP ≥90; systolic BP &lt;60.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pulse</td>
<td>Every 30 minutes for 1 hour, then</td>
<td>Fast, thready pulse : &gt;110 btt/min.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vaginal bleeding</td>
<td>Every hour for three hours</td>
<td>Sweaty or cold, clammy skin ; cold extremities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uterine hardness</td>
<td></td>
<td>Anxiety, confusion, loss of consciousness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temperature</td>
<td>Every 4 hours</td>
<td>Temperature &gt; 38°C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respiration</td>
<td></td>
<td>Rapid breathing (rate of 30 breaths per minute or more).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bladder (help the woman</td>
<td></td>
<td>Palmar or conjunctival pallor associated with 30 or more respirations per</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>empty her bladder if it</td>
<td>Every hour</td>
<td>minute (the woman tires rapidly or has tachypnea at rest).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>is distended)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breastfeeding</td>
<td>Every hour</td>
<td>The woman can’t void on her own and her bladder is distended.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological reaction</td>
<td>Every hour</td>
<td>Urinary incontinence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The newborn isn’t breastfeeding satisfactorily.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Breastfeeding has not yet begun.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Monitoring the newborn during the first 6 hours postpartum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parameter</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Danger signs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Respiration</td>
<td>• Immediately after birth then</td>
<td>Rapid respirations (more than 60 respirations per minute).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Color</td>
<td>• Every 15 minutes for 2 hours, then</td>
<td>Slow respirations (less than 30 respirations per minute).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Temperature (touch the baby’s</td>
<td>• Every 30 minutes for 1 hour, then</td>
<td>Grunting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feet and check axillary</td>
<td>• Every hour for three hours</td>
<td>Convolutions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>temperature if they are cold)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Generalized cyanosis or pallor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Umbilical cord for bleeding</td>
<td></td>
<td>Cyanosis of the extremities (acrocyanosis), pink body.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Presence of other danger</td>
<td></td>
<td>Cold feet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>signs</td>
<td></td>
<td>Temperature &lt; 36,5ºC.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Temperature &gt; 38ºC.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Umbilical cord bleeding</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Review of uterotonic drugs used for AMTSL


Definition of a uterotonic drug

Uterine stimulants (uterotonics) are medications given to stimulate a woman’s uterus to contract, or to increase the frequency and intensity of the contractions. These drugs are used to induce (start) or augment (speed) labour; facilitate uterine contractions following a spontaneous abortion; prevent postpartum haemorrhage during active management of the third stage of labour; treat haemorrhage following childbirth or abortion; and for other gynaecological reasons. The three uterotonic drugs used most frequently are the oxytocins, prostaglandins, and ergot alkaloids. Uterotonic drugs may be given intramuscularly (IM), intravenously (IV), and as a tablet that can be given orally, vaginally, rectally, or buccally.

Comparison of uterotonic drugs

Table 1 compares dosage, route of administration, drug action and effectiveness, side effects, and cautions for the most common uterotonic drugs used for AMTSL.

Table 1. Uterotonic drugs used for AMTSL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of drug/preparation</th>
<th>Dosage and route</th>
<th>Drug action and effectiveness</th>
<th>Side effects and cautions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Oxytocin</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posterior pituitary extract. Commonly used brand names include Pitocin or Syntocinon.</td>
<td>Give 10 units IM injection.*</td>
<td>• Acts within 2 to 3 minutes. • Effect lasts about 15 to 30 minutes.</td>
<td>• First choice. • No known contraindications for postpartum use. ** • Minimal or no side effects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Misoprostol</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synthetic prostaglandin E1 (PGE1) analogue. Commonly used brand names include Cytotec, Gymiso, Prostokos, Vagiprost, U-Miso</td>
<td>Give 600 mcg (three 200 mcg tablets) orally.</td>
<td>Orally: • Acts within 6 minutes. • Peak serum concentration between 18 and 34 minutes. • Effect lasts 75 minutes.</td>
<td>• No known contraindications for postpartum use. ** • Common side effects: shivering and elevated temperature.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ergometrine (methylergometrine), also known as ergonovine (methylergonovine)</strong></td>
<td>Preparation of ergot (usually comes in dark brown ampoule). Commonly used brand names include Methergine, Ergotrate, Ergotrate Maleate</td>
<td>Give 0.2 mg IM injection</td>
<td>• Acts within 6 to 7 minutes IM. • Effect lasts 2 to 4 hours.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Syntometrine</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combination of 5 IU oxytocin plus 0.5 mg ergometrine.</td>
<td>Give 1 ml IM injection.</td>
<td>• Combined rapid action of oxytocin and sustained action of ergometrine.</td>
<td>• Same cautions, contraindications, and side effects as ergometrine.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*If a woman has an IV, an option may be to give her 5 IU of oxytocin by slow IV push.

**This is intended as a guide for using these uterotonic drugs during the third stage of labor. Different guidelines apply when using these uterotonic drugs at other times or for other reasons.

***Lists of contraindications are not meant to be complete; evaluate each client for sensitivities and appropriateness before use of any uterotonic drug. Only some of the major postpartum contraindications are listed for the above drugs.