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Breast-fed babies get a love hormone

By Rebecca Smith
Medical Editor

BREAST-feeding triggers the release of chemicals that help mother and baby to bond, scientists claim today.

Researchers have shown how breast feeding releases a wave of a hormone linked to promoting trust and love.

Guidelines recommend that mothers breast-feed for the first six months, if possible, and continue for as long as they want.

Scientists from Warwick University found that breast-feeding releases a "wave" of the hormone oxytocin.

The research, published in the journal *Public Library of Science: Computational Biology*, says it has been known for 30 years that this hormone, linked to milk flow, is released. But scientists have been puzzled by how the pulses that control it were co-ordinated.

They found that during breast-feeding a chain reaction is started among the cells until they are all firing together in short intense bursts. Only breast-feeding triggers the synchronisation of the cells.

The researchers found how cells communicated with each other to co-ordinate the bursts.

Prof Jianfeng Feng, a biology researcher at the university, said: "We knew that these pulses arise. But how these bursts arise has been a major problem that has until now eluded explanation."