

BIOMEDICINE

Mother's milk contains leptin

The hormone leptin, thought to control obesity in adults, may play the same role in infants. That's the speculation of researchers who have discovered leptin in human breast milk.

Karen L. Houseknecht, an endocrinologist at Purdue University in West Lafayette, Ind., and her colleagues obtained samples of blood and breast milk from 23 lactating women. They found lower concentrations of leptin in the breast milk than in the mother's bloodstream. This finding suggests that the breast itself is not making or concentrating leptin but just passing on leptin present in the bloodstream.

The team detailed its findings in a recent issue of *BIOCHEMICAL AND BIOPHYSICAL RESEARCH COMMUNICATIONS*. This research is only a first look at the role that leptin may play during lactation, Houseknecht says. The findings raise the question of whether leptin delivery by breastfeeding sets the stage for a child's weight regulation later in life, she adds. On the other hand, leptin in breast milk may simply represent the physiology of the nursing mother.

Since research on human newborns raises ethical questions, Houseknecht plans to continue to look for clues to leptin's role in breast milk by studying cows and their calves.

—K.F.