Positive Feedback Mechanisms

Key Idea: Positive feedback mechanisms amplify a physiological response in order to achieve a particular outcome.

Positive feedback mechanisms amplify (increase) or speed up a physiological response, usually to achieve a particular outcome. Examples of positive feedback include fruit ripening, fever, blood clotting, childbirth (labor) and lactation (production of milk). A positive feedback mechanism stops when the end result is achieved (e.g. the baby is born, a pathogen is destroyed by a fever, or ripe fruit falls off a tree).

Positive feedback is less common than negative feedback because it creates an escalation in response, which is unstable. This response can be dangerous (or even cause death) if it is prolonged.

1. (a) Why is positive feedback much less common than negative feedback in body systems?

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(b) Why can positive feedback be dangerous if it continues on for too long? ____________________________

(c) How is a positive feedback loop normally stopped? ____________________________

2. (a) Name the regulatory factor in childbirth: ____________________________

(b) What event brings an end to the positive feedback loop in childbirth? ____________________________