Six Key Hormones in Pregnancy

**Human Chorionic Gonadotropin (hCG)**
- Produced by the placenta after implantation.
- Supports the function of the corpus luteum, a temporary structure in the ovaries essential in early pregnancy.
- Detected by pregnancy tests.

**Progesterone**
- Stimulates growth of blood vessels that supply the womb and inhibits contraction of the uterus so it grows as the baby does.
- Strengthens pelvic wall muscles for labour.

**Oestrogen**
- Helps the uterus grow, maintain its lining, and helps foetal organs develop.
- Activates and regulates production of other hormones.
- Stimulates breast growth and milk duct development.

**Prolactin**
- Produced by the pituitary gland.
- Main hormone needed to produce breast milk.
- Stimulates breast growth and milk duct development.

**Relaxin**
- Inhibits uterus contraction to prevent premature birth.
- Relaxes blood vessels, increasing blood flow to the placenta and kidneys.
- Softens and lengthens the cervix during birth.

**Oxytocin**
- Produced by the pituitary gland.
- Levels rise at the start of labour, stimulating contractions of uterine muscle.
- Triggers production of prostaglandins, which increase contractions further.
- Can be used to induce labour if it doesn't start naturally.