

Options for pain management during labor

Adapted from SOAP Patient Education Sub-Committee

There are many different options for pain control during labor and delivery. Every woman's labor is different, and the decision on how to manage pain during your labor must be made by you. You are free to change your mind at any time during labor.

Epidural pain relief is the most effective type of pain control for labor, but there are many other options to help control labor pain. We will present these different options in this brochure.

It is important that you discuss decisions regarding pain relief during labor with your health care professionals and have your questions answered. Each hospital will have its own policies and protocols. This information is a guide for you, but it does not replace the practices of your hospital.

What are other ways to manage pain during labor other than an epidural?

Non medicine options include:

- Changing your position or walking around - this can be more comfortable than lying down
- Using a birthing ball
- Relaxation techniques: breathing, meditation, relaxation exercises, massage therapy, yoga, music
- Aromatherapy, meditation, or self-hypnosis
- Taking a warm shower or bath, water immersion/hydrotherapy
- Having a doula or support person present
- Acupuncture and acupressure



Medicine options include:

- Inhaled pain medication (nitrous oxide)
- Intravenous (IV) pain medications



What are the other ways you can receive pain medications?

You can receive pain medication through your IV line or by an injection in your muscle. The most common medications given for pain relief during labor are opioid medications. Examples of opioid medications are morphine, fentanyl, nalbuphine (Nubain), butorphanol (Stadol), hydromorphone (Dilaudid), and remifentanyl.

What are the side effects of opioid medications?

Opioid medications all have similar side effects. Side effects can include nausea, vomiting, itching, and slowed breathing. These medications can get into your bloodstream and potentially affect your baby. It is possible for these medications to sedate the baby and slow the baby's breathing if they are given too close to delivery.

What is nitrous oxide?

Nitrous oxide is a gas you breathe into your lungs through a face mask. Nitrous oxide makes labor pain more bearable, but it does not take away your pain completely.



What are benefits of nitrous oxide?

Nitrous oxide can be used at any time, including right up to time of delivery and even during pushing. Nitrous oxide can be used for many OB procedures such as epidural placements and repair of vaginal cuts. It is also safe for your baby.

What are the risks of nitrous oxide?

Nitrous oxide can make you feel dizzy or nauseous. Wearing a face mask can be uncomfortable for people with claustrophobia (fear of small spaces). There are medical conditions that make nitrous oxide less safe, and your anesthesiologist will help decide if nitrous oxide is a safe option for you.



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