

## Pain Management Options in Labour

The amount of pain you experience in labour varies greatly from one person to the other. The pain that you have depends upon the size and position of your baby, the size and shape of your pelvis, the strength of your contractions, the length of your labour and your previous experiences. Your care team is available to support you during your labour and birth and in your choice of comfort measures and pain relief.

There are many types of pain relief to choose from. For more information, please go to the Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada website:

<https://www.pregnancyinfo.ca/birth/labour/pain-management/>

### Drug-Free Comfort Measures

The comfort measures below can help reduce painful sensations and make you feel more calm and relaxed. Coping techniques through labour that don't include medication can be quite effective.

#### **Water Therapy (Hydrotherapy)**

- Shower or Bath

Sensation of running water or being in water can provide relief

#### Heat/Cold

- Place warm or cold packs on your lower abdomen or back

#### **Massage and Touch**

Certain massage techniques have been found to be comforting in labour. Having your support person massage or provide pressure to your lower back can be helpful. Ask your healthcare provider to show you different techniques that you can try.

- Light or firm rhythmic stroking over shoulders, neck, back, abdomen or legs
- Firm pressure on your back or hips, especially during contractions
- Acupressure

Pressure on your back, hands or feet can help with pain relief

#### **Movement and Repositioning**

Moving and repositioning your body during labour allows you to use gravity to help the baby change positions and move lower in the birth canal.

- Walking, alternating with rest periods
- Standing, leaning forward on a support person or bed, or slow dancing movements
- Squatting or a supported squat position

- Being on your hands and knees
- Pelvic rocking, from side to side or front to back

Birth balls are tools that can help support different positions and movements that would be difficult to do on your own.

### **Distraction therapy**

- Listening to music
- Focusing on images or thoughts
- Guided imagery or meditation
- Focusing on breathing

### **Patterned Breathing**

Using different breathing techniques can help you remain focused and in control of your labour.

- Concentrating on slow, deep breathing and on relaxing muscles during and between contractions

### **Continuous labour support**

Having a continuous labour support can provide you with confidence and help you feel relaxed and less anxious through your labour. It has shown to be associated with less labour interventions.

## Using Medication to Manage Pain

### **Nitrous Oxide Gas**

This is sometimes called laughing gas. This type of medication is an inhaled mixture of oxygen and nitrous gas. This gas may dull or lessen pain.

- This is a gas given through a mask that you hold yourself over your nose and mouth.

Holding the mask can give you a focus that distracts you from the pain and allows you to control how much gas you breathe in.

- The effect of the gas passes quickly and it does not affect your baby.
- Side effects of nitrous oxide include dizziness, light-headedness, nausea and vomiting.

### **Narcotics**

Narcotics are used in throughout labour to help with pain relief. They are quite effective but do sometimes have side effects for both you and the baby. Narcotics given during labour work quickly and can lessen pain and help you cope with painful contractions.

The main types are Morphine and Fentanyl.

- Narcotics are given by injection into a large muscle in your leg or buttocks or can be given into a vein through an IV (intravenous). A patient controlled pump that delivers the narcotics (through an IV) with a button you press may also be an option.

- Narcotics can reach the baby. After the birth of your baby a clinical team member will watch your baby closely for any signs of breathing issues if you received any narcotics.
- Side effects of narcotics include nausea, vomiting, lower blood pressure, slow or fast heart rate and slower breathing than normal.

### **Pudendal Block**

A pudendal block is a freezing medication that is injected through the wall of the vagina to numb the area between the vagina and the anus. The freezing works quickly to lessen pain in the area it is injected into during birth and during repair of any tears after birth.

- The medication given with a pudendal block does not affect the baby.
- It does not relieve the pain from contractions and not all providers are trained to do this

### **Epidural**

Epidurals are given by a specialized physician called an Anesthesiologist. It is a type of pain relief that numbs the nerves that you feel labour pain with.

- An epidural involves an injection of freezing in your back and the placement of a small tube that will continuously give you pain relief until after your baby is born.
- The epidural is usually a quick and effective pain relief option that allows you to move around as much as possible with little to no medication that reaches your baby.
- Side effects of an epidural include a drop in blood pressure, sore back and occasionally a headache.

### **Spinal Analgesia**

Spinal analgesia is given by a specialized physician called an Anesthesiologist. It includes a needle inserted into your back and a small amount of medication is injected.

- Spinal analgesia is quick and effective and little to no medication reaches the baby.
- This analgesia lasts one or two hours and is usually only given once during labour (in most cases for a Cesarean section).
- Side effects of a spinal include a drop in blood pressure and occasionally a headache