

Pain Management Options for Labour



Pain Management Options in Labour

The amount of pain you experience in labour is different from one person to the other. The pain that you have depends on many things like:

- the size and position of your baby,
- shape of your pelvis,
- strength of your contractions;
- use of oxytocin (“the drip”); and
- other 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 pain and help you feel calm and relaxed. Coping techniques through labour that don't include medication can be quite effective. Some people may find that drug-free options are not as effective to manage discomfort and pain in labour. Drug-free measures can;

- Decrease labor pain.
- Help with a good birth experience.

Water Therapy (Hydrotherapy)

- Shower or Bath
 - This is an effective option for pain management.
 - Feeling 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 (counter pressure) or hips (double hip squeeze), especially during contractions.
- Use acupressure with pressure on your back, hands or feet.

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 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.
- Birthing balls, Peanut Balls, and pillows can help support different positions and movements.

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.
- Relaxing muscles during and between contractions.

Continuous labour support

- Having a continuous labour support can provide you with confidence.
- Help you feel relaxed and less anxious through your labour.
- 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 through. This gas may dull or lessen pain. Your delivering site will follow their local guidelines for safe nitrous oxide use in labour.

- This is a gas given through a N95 filtered 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 during 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 with a button you press, may also be an option.
- There are side effects that you and your baby will be monitored for.
- The care team will monitor you and your baby for any side effects and be prepared to treat them.
- Narcotics can reach the baby. After the birth of your baby a clinical team member will watch your baby closely for any signs of slow breathing.
- Side effects of narcotics to you may 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 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.

Epidural

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

- The medication injection is in your back and a small tube is placed. This will 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.
- There is little to no medication that reaches your baby.
- Side effects of an epidural include a drop in blood pressure, sore back and sometimes can cause a headache.

Spinal Analgesia

Spinal analgesia are given by a physician called an Anesthesiologists. It is most often used for planned cesarean sections. It includes a needle inserted into your back and a small amount of medication is injected.

- Spinal analgesia is quick and effective.
- There is little to no medication reaches the baby.
- This analgesia lasts one or two hours. It is usually only given once.
- Side effects of a spinal include a drop in blood pressure and sometimes can cause a headache.

This document is available on the momsandkidssask website at

<https://momsandkidssask.saskhealthauthority.ca/pregnancy-birth-newborns/labour-birth>

