



SKILLS FOR BIRTH AND PARENTHOOD

PAIN RELIEF

Hospital Pain Relief Options

Ask your midwife or doctor to explain what's available in your hospital so you can decide what's best for you.

Write down your birth wishes | preferences in your birth plan.

Remember it's important to keep an open mind as you may find you want more pain relief than you'd planned and that's Ok or your doctor or midwife may suggest more effective pain relief to help the birth.

Pain relief is there for you if you need it – Having options allows you to choose the best option for you.

Entonox (gas & air) this is a combination of two gases: nitrous oxide and oxygen	
Duration	Only effective whilst being breathed, plus about 15 seconds longer
Route Administered	Handheld used via a mouthpiece
When given	At any time, although can be tiring if used for prolonged periods
Advantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An effective means of easing pain: especially for the long and strong contractions of transition • Provides a distraction and focus • Mum is in control • Gives extra oxygen therefore may provide the uterine muscle with added O₂ to help it work effectively • Non known effects in baby
Common side effects to be aware of	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not relieve the pain entirely • May make you feel nauseous • Can make you feel drowsy • If used incorrectly (fast breathing) can make you feel dizzy and experience pins and needles.

Opiates Pethidine or Diamorphine	
Dosage (Weight related)	Pethidine 50-100mg Diamorphine 5-10mg
Duration	2-3 hours
Route Administered	Intramuscular injection in the leg or buttock
When given	During the first stage of labour, when the pain associated with the contractions begins to distress the mum. [Ideally should not be given if the birth is expected within 1 hour]
Advantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sedates/ relaxes, take the "edge off" contractions • Has a secondary effect as a muscle relaxant, which may lessen pain and reduce muscle tension, allowing faster dilation • Can reduce the pain
Common side effects to be aware of	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not relieve the pain completely • Nausea vomiting and dizziness are all common side effects. • Creates a 'high' with feelings of floating and light-headedness, making concentration at time more difficult. • May depress sucking reflex initially so early skin to skin and frequent breastfeeding recommended.

Epidural Anesthetic	
Dosage	Standard dose given by anesthetist, further tops ups by midwives
Duration	Usually between 1-3 hours Maybe done once then topped up, or more commonly delivered continuously through a pump, using a boost button can allow mum control and give further relief. This is called PCEA patient controlled epidural analgesia
Route Administered	A small amount of local anaesthetic is injected into the space around the spinal cord, which numbs the body below the site – giving excellent pain relief.
When given	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At any time in the first stage of labour, but usually once labour fully established • Prior to a caesarean section • Medically indicated for example to reduce high blood pressure
Advantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A usually reliable method of pain relief, with numbness from the waist down • Relief from pain may allow greater relaxation and a more rapid dilatation • Relieving the pain may increase mums' positive feelings about labour and birth • Allows mum to be awake during a C/S
Common side effects to be aware of	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confined to a bed, with resultant loss of mobility • Contractions and baby will be monitored • May not be fully effective • Can slow down labour, resulting in the need for syntocion to help speed up the contractions and make them stronger • BP can sometimes fall therefore all mums will require a drip for extra fluids • Difficulty emptying the bladder, a catheter is frequently used • Research suggests an increased need for an instrumental delivery due to reduced sensation of giving birth.

Spinal Anesthetic	
Dosage	Standard dose given by anesthetist
Duration	A few hours
Route Administered	A one-time injection of anesthetic given directly into the spinal fluid which numbs the body below the site very rapidly – giving excellent pain relief.
When given	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prior to a caesarean section if you don't have an epidural in-situ already [acts quickly and rapidly if the C/S is an emergency]
Advantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reliable, quick acting short-lasting method of pain relief • Allows mum to be awake during a C/S or procedure
Common side effects to be aware of	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confined to a bed, with resultant loss of mobility • BP can sometimes fall therefore all mums will require a drip for extra fluids • Difficulty emptying the bladder, a catheter is frequently used

Home Pain Relief Options

There are several ways to cope during labour at home before deciding to go into hospital. It may take time for your labour to become established and therefore it is important to rest, conserving energy, to eat and drink little and often.

- During the latent phase of labour stay in bed. Once contractions become more regular your body will tell you to move and adopt more comfortable positions. Try leaning forward against a support e.g., table chair, toilet, birthing ball, wall or another person. Squatting, rocking, and walking up and down the stairs can all help. Comfortable positions do vary from person to person and labour to labour...experiment to find what is right for you.
- Controlled slow breathing keeping your jaw relaxed and focusing on the outward breath is especially important. Closed mouth and clenched teeth lead to tense shoulders. Tense shoulders lead to a rise in adrenalin more pain and a reduced ability to cope with labour.
- Warm bath can help but try to use once your contractions are regular. If used too early can Holt or slow labour down. Try instead to stand in the shower and use the direction of the spray on your back, legs or tummy to ease the discomfort. Stamp your feet to help distract from the pain. Once labour becomes established the bath can ease tension and help you relax. Ask your birth partner to pour warm water over your tummy during a contraction.
- Massage for some can greatly reduce tension and anxiety. Having someone touch you can be a great source of comfort, helping increase your natural hormone oxytocin, allowing your labour to progress. Using oil or talc the sacrum, sacroiliac joints, neck and shoulders are ideal to massage. (Practice before ... on the day the last thing you need I your birthing partner to massage you like they are waxing a car!!)
- Simple analgesia i.e., paracetamol can help in the early stages. Discuss with your GP if you feel stronger analgesia will work more effectively.
- Warmth using a blanket over the shoulders can give great comfort. Use a hot water bottle wrapped in a pillowcase to help ease lower abdominal and back pain. Cold can also be effective.... try ice packs, or frozen peas wrapped up. Try alternating between hot and cold.
- Hire a TENS machine (Transcutaneous Electrical Nerve Stimulation) to use as soon as you feel labour is starting. If applied to the back too late ...once labour fully established, it will not give you the relief or distraction you may need. TENS is the passage of small pulsating electrical currents through the skin, between two pairs of electrodes: attached either side of the spine in the lumbar and sacral regions. It acts by stimulating the release of your natural pain killers Endorphins

TENS	Duration	Only effective when being used
	Route Administered	Sticky electrodes
	When given	At any time, but the earlier used the more effective
	Advantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An effective means of easing pain • Provides a distraction and focus of attention • Mum is in control – you press a continuous boost button during the contraction & turn off after it has faded • No effect to baby
	Disadvantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not relieve the pain entirely • If used too late becomes an irritant. • You may not like the sensation • Cannot use is the bath or pool