

EPIDURAL

An epidural is where painkilling drugs are passed into the small of your back via a fine tube. It is called a regional anesthetic, which means the drug is injected around the nerves that carry signals from the part of your body that feels pain when you're in labour. The result will be that your belly feels numb, giving you very effective pain relief.

Advantages

- Provides pain relief without sleepiness
- May make labour more effective
- Considered safe for mother and baby
- Can be maintained if caesarean section or forceps birth become necessary.

Disadvantages

- Requires an intravenous and often a catheter in your bladder
- Confines you to bed
- May lengthen pushing part of labour

EPIDURAL (continued)

Complications

- Drop in blood pressure. This can be prevented and/or corrected with intravenous IV fluids.
- Back pain. This usually goes away by itself, quickly.
- Incomplete pain relief. The tube may need to be repositioned or the epidural may need to be repeated.
- Headache. This happens in a small number of patients and usually goes away in 2-3 days.
- Severe complications such as coma, paralysis and death. These are possible but very rare.

If you wish to discuss these risks, please speak to your caregivers.

Prepared by Maternal Child Program
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A Guide to Choices for **PAIN RELIEF** during Childbirth

Pain is an individual experience. So too are the choices available to you for pain relief during labour and the birth of your baby.

This information has been prepared to help you choose the best way to manage pain during your contractions and birth.

Every birth is different. Not all women will need or want to use all of the techniques described here. Keep an open mind and learn about your options. If you have questions, please discuss them with your caregivers.

At Joseph Brant Hospital, we offer these pain relief choices:

- Relaxation and breathing techniques
- Shower/whirlpool
- Use of a birthing ball
- Nitrous oxide
- Narcotic analgesic
- Epidural or spinal analgesic.

Relaxation and Breathing (R & B) Techniques

R&B Techniques:

- Allow you to focus on breathing
- Shift awareness away from pain
- Reduce the need for pain medication

Techniques may include:

- Imagery, massage, music or relaxation tapes
- Use of the birthing ball

Shower/Whirlpool

- Water massage helps to relax and ease discomfort, especially back labour

Nitrous Oxide

Entonox, or gas and air, is a colourless and odourless gas made up of half oxygen and half nitrous oxide, or laughing gas, as it is commonly known. It has a calming effect and takes the edge off labour pain, rather than blocking it out completely.

Advantages:

- Helps to relieve the discomfort of contractions and enables you to rest between contractions. It works by breathing a mixture of 50% nitrous oxide and 50% oxygen through a mask. Allows you to be in control. You breathe with the mask when you feel the need.

Disadvantages:

- May make you feel claustrophobic breathing with mask
- May cause you to feel confused or disoriented

Narcotic Analgesics

Narcotic analgesics can be given through your IV or by injection.

Advantages:

- Allows you to rest and relax between contractions
- Provides moderate pain relief
- Usually used in early active phase of labour
- Safe for mom and baby

Disadvantages:

- *Baby:* may be sleepy after birth and slow to start breastfeeding
- *Mom:* may cause dizziness, sleepiness, nausea and vomiting