

Giving birth

Pain medications that can help you



You're preparing for the unique moment that is the birth of your child. This fact sheet provides information on the medications that may be offered to you at different stages of your labour and delivery.

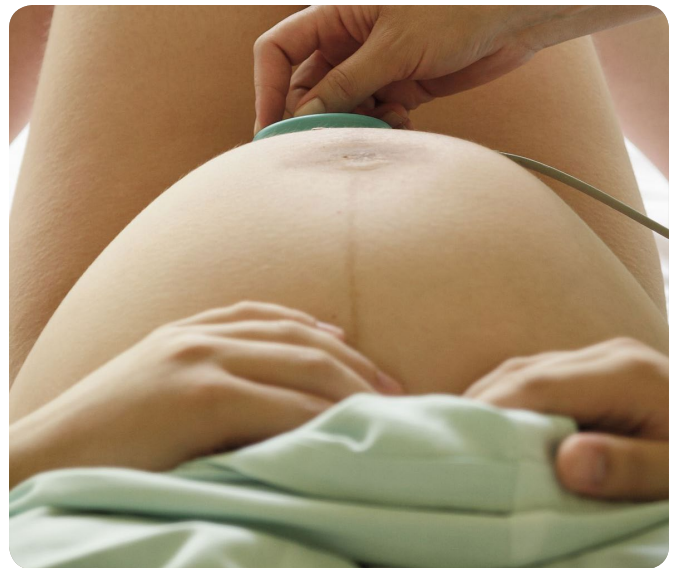
Pain relief methods: do I have a choice?

Pain during childbirth is normal: it's a sign that labour is progressing. There are several methods to relieve pain or help you manage it better. See those described in this sheet. Most often, the delivery goes well and you can choose the method(s) you prefer.

Towards the end of your pregnancy, use your prenatal appointments to ask your doctor any questions you may have. Feel free to discuss any concerns with your doctor.

The healthcare team will do their best to make sure everything goes as you wish. But in any delivery, there can be unexpected events.

Your condition or your baby's may lead the team to recommend a specific method. Also, if an emergency arises, decisions will have to be made quickly. Be prepared for this.



Epidural

An epidural is a type of analgesia that “freezes” nerves in the lower back, abdomen, and pelvis. It reduces pain while contractions still continue.

It is usually given during the active phase of labour, when the cervix is open (dilated) 4 cm or more.

An anaesthesiologist must administer the epidural. A very thin tube (catheter) is inserted into the lower back through a puncture between two vertebrae. Pain medication is then injected through the tube. The most commonly used are fentanyl and bupivacaine. Afterwards, the dose can be adjusted according to your needs. The epidural will remain in place until the birth.

What are the side effects?

As with all medications, the epidural can have side effects. The most common are:

- higher risk of having to use forceps or vacuum to help the baby to be born; this is the most common side effect
- a feeling of heaviness in your legs, which may prevent you from getting up
- a slowing down of labour (fewer contractions)
- more difficulty with starting to breastfeed

If you request an epidural:

- > It could happen that, just when you would like to have an epidural, the anaesthesiologist is busy with another emergency in the hospital. So you may have to wait. If this happens, the team will be able to offer you other ways to relieve your pain while you wait.
- > If you have difficulty getting up and walking after receiving the epidural, it's still important to move around a little. This helps your labour and the baby's descent. For example, vary your position in the bed or ask to have the angle of the bed changed.



Laughing gas

Laughing gas may be administered near the end of labour.

It promotes relaxation, which is why it can help control the pain of childbirth. It should only be used during contractions. This gas is invisible and has a slight odour. It's a mixture of nitrous oxide and oxygen. The nurse will prepare the bottle and the mask for you.

What are the side effects?

Laughing gas can cause temporary disturbances. The most common side effects are:

- dizziness
- feeling half-asleep (drowsiness)
- confusion



If you use laughing gas

It's important that you're the one holding the mask, and not the person accompanying you, so that you can decide when to remove it.

Throughout your labour, you can count on the presence and support of the whole team!

Are there other types of pain medications?

There are others, but they are usually recommended by the medical team for certain specific situations, so they are used much less often.

Two examples are:

> Nalbuphine injections

Nalbuphine (Nubain) is a general pain medication. It is usually injected into one arm, by the nurse.

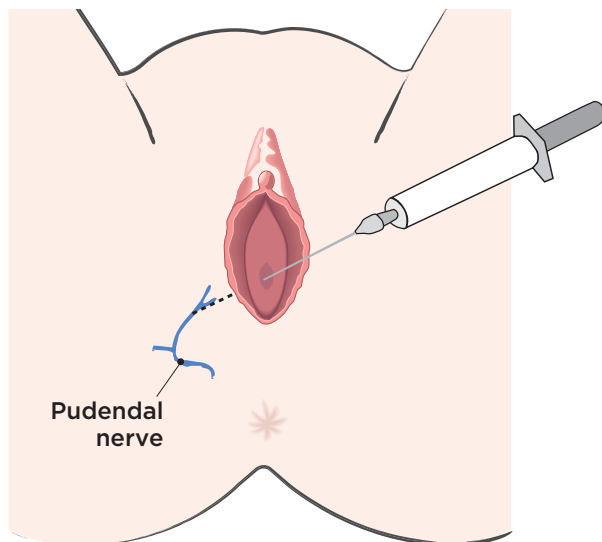
This medication is generally given during the active phase of labour, when the cervix is dilated 4 cm or more. It may take 15 to 30 minutes to take effect, and will last a few hours.

Possible side effects

Nalbuphine may cause dizziness and drowsiness in mothers and newborns. You may also feel numb. These side effects are mild and temporary.

> Pudendal nerve block

In some cases, a pudendal nerve block can be used to reduce pain in the vaginal area. It can be used when the cervix is fully dilated. The doctor inserts a needle inside the vagina to reach the pudendal nerve (found in the pelvic and genital area). The medicine injected is called lidocaine. You may still feel some pain or pressure, but not as much.



Possible side effects

The injection may be a little painful and cause bruising (hematoma) where the needle was inserted. These are the most common side effects.

Who can I contact for help or to ask questions?

If you have questions, discuss them with a health professional at your next visit, or contact the nurse in the Perinatal Clinic.

When you're back home, if you feel sad, or if you have difficulties related to being a parent, or with your partner, don't hesitate to contact the Perinatal Clinic.



USEFUL RESOURCES

For information on methods of relieving pain with medication, please refer to the fact sheet:

[*Giving birth - Managing your pain naturally*](#)

You received the guide From Tiny Tot to Toddler at your first medical visit. You can also consult it online:

> www.inspq.qc.ca/en/tiny-tot

To learn more about pregnancy, delivery, or follow-up care, visit our internet site.



Videos, other fact sheets, and more resources are available at:

centredesnaissanceschum.com

The content of this document in no way replaces the recommendations and diagnoses made, or the treatment suggested by your health professional.

To find out more about the Centre hospitalier de l'Université de Montréal
chumontreal.qc.ca



Questions

Write down any questions you want to ask your care team so you don't forget anything.





Observations - Comments

Write down observations you feel are important: your symptoms, treatments, follow-up, energy level, spirit, etc.





Upcoming appointments

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