

Managing labour and birth

This information sheet aims to answer some commonly asked questions about pain management during labour and birth

IMPORTANT: This is general information only. Ask your doctor, midwife or nurse about your own situation.

Labour pains and sensations are a normal part of your body's birthing function.

What do you feel during labour and birth?

Each woman's experience is different. Many women describe labour and birth as:

- Cramping and aching (period type pain) that comes and goes—labour contractions
- Contractions felt in the stomach (abdomen), lower back, and/or sometimes in the thighs
- Contractions get stronger, last longer, and come more often
- A pressure low in your vagina as your baby moves down ready for birth
- An urge to push and a burning and/or stinging in your vagina as your birth gets close

As your body gets ready for birth, hormones help to open the birth canal and also act as natural pain killers.

What can affect your experience?

Many factors can affect your own experience of labour and birth including:

- Your values, culture, views, and expectations
- Views of your family and friends
- Your previous experiences with pain and/or birth
- How supported you feel
- Type of care you have (e.g. continuity of carer)
- How involved you feel in making choices
- How your body responds during labour and birth

How can you prepare for labour and birth pain?

There are many things you can do to prepare for labour and birth, such as:

- Learn about your options—natural methods, medication choices, medical interventions
- Ask your healthcare provider about local options and resources including birth preparation classes
- Think about your preferences during pregnancy to build confidence with decisions in labour
- Practice relaxation (e.g. breathing, meditation, yoga, mindfulness) during pregnancy so you are familiar with it in labour
- Seek expert advice from independent or complementary care providers (e.g. acupuncture, acupressure, aromatherapy, labour breathing, hypnosis)
- Discuss your preferences with your support person/s before labour so they know what you want
- Talk with your health care provider about your preferences and how they can support you

How can you 'work with' and/or ease labour pains?



Support person
work together on your pain management options



Be flexible
an open mind can make your birth experience more satisfying



Talk about it
share your feelings and experiences



Choices and options for management of pain during labour and birth



- Music
- Breathing
- Reflexology
- Positioning
- Massage
- Walking
- Swaying

...AND

Water (shower or bath)

- Comforting, reduces pain intensity
- Shower any time
- Bath (if available) in established labour



'TENS' machine

- Boosts your own natural pain killers
- Distracts from pain
- May need to hire or buy your own

'Gas' (oxygen and nitrous oxide)

- Use in established labour
- Dulls pain and helps relax between contractions
- Can make you dizzy or feel sick

Sterile water injection

- Injected under the skin (usually on your back)
- Lasts around 90 minutes (can be repeated)
- Stings



Narcotic (opioid) injection

- Strong pain relieving medication
- Not recommended near time of birth as may cause feeding or (rarely) breathing problems in baby after birth
- Can make you feel sick or "out of it"

Epidural

- Usually very good at completely relieving pain
- Specialist doctor (anaesthetist) puts thin tube into your spine
- Pain medication is given into the tube
- While it is in, your movement may be limited
- You will need:
 - Extra monitoring (you and baby)
 - An IV drip (needle into a vein) to give fluids
 - (Usually) a catheter to drain your urine

Support & information

Queensland Clinical Guidelines parent information www.health.qld.gov.au/qcg

13HEALTH (13 432584) telephone support providing health information, referral and services www.qld.gov.au/health/contacts/advice/13health

Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists & Faculty of Pain Medicine information on pain relief and having a baby www.anzca.edu.au/patient-information

Pregnancy, Birth & Baby Helpline (1800 882 436) free, confidential, professional counselling and information on conception, pregnancy, birthing and postnatal care. www.health.gov.au/pregnancyhelpline

MumSpace resources supporting mental and emotional wellbeing during and beyond pregnancy www.mumspace.com.au

Women's Health Queensland Wide (1800 017 676) health promotion, information and education service www.womhealth.org.au

Inform my care website comparing information about public and private hospitals in Queensland www.informmycare.qld.gov.au

GidgetFoundation (1300 851 758) phone and telehealth psychologist support www.gidgetfoundation.org.au/