

How to Manage Pain During Labor and Delivery

Labor and delivery usually means hard work, long hours, and a lot of pain. But there are ways to have a more comfortable experience. Ask your doctor for safe and effective options for you and your baby. Make a decision early and tell your doctor when you are in the hospital.



Common Procedure for Pain During Labor

An epidural is commonly used for labor pains. It blocks pain in the lower body. You will stay awake and still have feeling in the lower body. It will not slow down labor.

To get an epidural, you'll be put on an IV, which is normally done when you are admitted to the hospital. Then you lie on your left side or sit leaning over a table or a person. A doctor (an anesthesiologist) will insert a thin tube into your back, tape it in place, and deliver medication through it.

With the epidural, your lower body will feel numb. You won't feel the pain of contractions. The medicine can be used throughout a long labor. Ask for more epidural medicine whenever it gets painful or even before you have pain. The anesthesiologist will check in with you and monitor how much medicine you need during labor. The tube will be removed shortly after delivery.

Procedures to Relieve Pain During Delivery

Spinal block numbs the lower body. It relieves pain when the baby needs to be helped out of the vagina with forceps or by vacuum extraction. It is also used for a C-section. The drug is injected into the lower back. You'll remain awake and alert.

Local anesthesia numbs a small area, such as the vagina. It relieves pain when the doctor needs to cut the vaginal opening or when the vagina tears during delivery. It also reduces pain when the doctor repairs the incision or tear.

Other Procedures Your Doctor May Suggest

General anesthesia makes you completely unconscious. It is only given in emergency situations, like if the baby is in distress or the woman does not respond to other drug options.

Side Effects

Although the drugs listed above are generally safe, there can be side effects. Tell your doctor right away if you have a headache, fever, or if some part of your body turns red or swollen, or feels hot.

What Procedures Are Used for a C-section?

A C-section is a surgery in which the doctor cuts into the mother's lower belly to deliver the baby. Before the procedure, you will have an epidural or a spinal block to numb the lower half of your body. You can remain awake and alert for the birth of your baby. You may still feel the doctor touching you, but you will not feel pain. An anesthesiologist will make sure the drugs are working properly.

Do I Have Other Options if I Don't Want to Use Drugs?

Yes. The methods below may help you deal with the pain:

- Practice breathing techniques. Learn to breathe at different speeds, take deep breaths, and breathe quickly.
- Meditate. It can help you focus your breathing, calm your mind, and relax your body during labor.
- Focus on visualizing something. For example, imagine who your baby will look like or how long the baby's fingers and toes will be.
- Watch TV if the hospital room has one, listen to music, or play games to help distract you during labor.

Plan Ahead but Be Flexible

Plan how you would like to manage your labor and delivery pains before you go to the hospital. It will prepare you for the big day and make your wishes clear to your doctor. Be flexible in case something unexpected comes up. Your doctor may need to do things differently in the best interest of you and your baby.

Talk to your doctor and nurses! They can only help you when they understand your feelings, concerns, pain, and decisions.

