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## **Pain During Childbirth**

You have probably heard many stories from family, friends and even strangers about giving birth. People seem to only want to share the “horror” stories. The experience is very different for everyone. And though it is rarely easy, the labor process can be very rewarding.

### **Why is labor painful?**

During labor the uterus pushes the baby down and stretches your cervix open. Each time the uterine muscles flex you will probably feel pain like a strong cramp. Most contractions last 30-60 seconds with a pain free interval in between when you can rest.

### **I don't want to use pain medicine. What can I do?**

These less tense and afraid you are, the less painful your labor will be. Three things can help you labor successfully without using pain medication: knowledge about what to expect, emotional support and coaching during your labor, and belief in yourself. Talk with your provider about your wishes. They have great advice on ways you achieve your goal.

### **Is there pain medicine if I need it?**

There are many types of safe pain relief available. The most common pain medications are narcotics and epidural anesthesia.

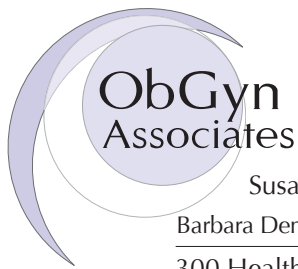
### **What are the pros & cons of narcotics?**

Pros: They give fast pain relief. Most can be given directly IV. They may help you relax and be more comfortable. They usually don't slow your labor.

Cons: The effects of narcotics don't last long. They may cause nausea. They may cause you to feel “out of it” or sleepy. They may sedate the baby and make it harder for him/her to breathe right after birth. Narcotics don't take away all the pain, but rather they lessen the intensity.

### **What is an epidural?**

An epidural numbs your body from the waist down. It involves putting a needle and then a small flexible tube into a space near the spine in your lower back. No needle remains in your back and at no time is anything being placed near your spinal cord. The pain medication is then infused through the tube at a rate that will keep you comfortable for the remainder of your labor. The medication will not make you or the baby sleepy. However, you will not be able to walk and your activity will be limited. You also may have a harder time pushing your baby out because you won't be able to feel the sensation of what you are doing.



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### **What can I do before labor to help?**

Stay active all during your pregnancy. It will give you more stamina. Take childbirth classes. The more you know the less you fear. Arrange for a birth coach or doula.

### **What can I do in early labor?**

Rest when you need to but stay active when you can. Go for a walk. Drink lots of fluid. Eat light meals. Take a warm shower or bath. Go swimming.

### **What can I do in active labor?**

All women who cope well during labor go back and forth between resting between contractions and movements that help them cope with the pain during the contractions. Each person has their own rhythm that works. You can try:

Rocking gently. Focusing on your natural breathing pattern. Change positions often. Remember labor does not last forever. Believe you can do it, because you can!

### **What can my birth coach do during labor?**

Help you find your rhythm and work with you to find something new when that stops working. Give you a back rub. Hold your hand. Help you change positions and find a comfortable resting position. Offer you ice chips, water or juice. Fetch things you need. Cheer you on and believe in you and the power of your body.

### **What will my health care provider do for me during labor?**

Answer your questions. Check your progress and make suggestions for what could happen next. Assure you that things are going normally. Provide pain medication if needed. Make sure that you and your baby are safe.