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# Pain relief in labour

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**Not everyone will experience pain during the birth of their baby/babies. This leaflet will give you some basic information about the various methods of pain management available should you need them. After you have read it, take some time to discuss it with your midwife or the doctors and record it in your birth plan. Alternatively, you may choose to wait and see how your labour progresses before making up your mind.**

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## **Relaxation and breathing exercises**

At your antenatal classes you will be shown methods of relaxation and breathing exercises. These can be extremely useful and for some this is all that is needed. They can help you to manage the feelings during your birth, either alone or alongside other methods of pain management.

## **Water**

You may find taking a bath or using the birthing pool useful. This can be combined with relaxation and breathing exercises and entonox (gas and air). There are birthing pools available on Rushey and in the Delivery Suite; please tell your midwife on arrival so they can see if one is available.

## **Sterile water injections for management of back pain in labour**

You may be offered this by your midwife if you are experiencing severe back pain in labour from a back to back labour (OP position). This technique consists of up to four small injections of sterile water into your skin in four areas of your lower back. This may help to provide you with some relief from your back pain and can be combined with other forms of pain management. This is a new form of pain management therefore the research is in its early stages. As a result, it is not nationally recommended, but our local audit showed that women found this helpful in coping with back pain, especially in early labour. The only side effect of the injection was stinging in the skin during the injections which subsided after about a minute so the technique is considered very safe. More research is being undertaken to see how effective the injections are and we are continuing to offer sterile water injections until the results of larger studies are known. If you are interested please speak to your midwife.

## **Gas and air (entonox)**

This is a mixture of nitrous oxide (laughing gas) and oxygen. You breathe it in through a mask during your contractions. It can be very useful, particularly towards the end of labour, either on its own or in addition to other pain management options. It can sometimes make you feel a bit sleepy or sick while you are breathing it but this does not last long and it has no effect upon the baby/babies.

## **TENS (transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation)**

This is a self-administered form of pain management. It consists of four rubber pads placed on the lower half of your back. Small electrical impulses are sent through these all the time, which you can boost during a contraction. They cause a tingling sensation. The pain management works by helping to release your body's own painkillers (endorphins). It may be all you need to manage your pain but it can also be combined with most other types of pain relief. However, if you need an epidural or decide to use the pool the TENS would have to be stopped and the pads removed. The advantage of TENS is that you are in control of your pain management and it does not make you or the baby sleepy as no drugs are involved. If you think that you would like to try TENS, talk to your midwife, as you will need to arrange to buy or hire a machine.

## **Pain relieving injections**

A morphine based drug can be given into a muscle in your leg during labour to help with the pain. Some find it very successful and all they need however, it can make you sleepy and sick and your baby may be born a bit sleepy, which can affect your feeding journey

All the methods so far discussed are available on both the Rushey Midwife led Unit and the Delivery Suite.

**However, epidurals and patient controlled intravenous analgesia (Remifentanil PCA) are only available in the main Delivery Suite.** These are discussed in a separate leaflet. Please ask your midwife for a copy or visit [www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk/maternity](http://www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk/maternity) to download a copy.

## **Finally**

This is only a brief explanation about pain management in labour. You may have lots of questions. Ask your midwife or the anaesthetist and we will do our best to help you.

For more detailed information, visit The Obstetric Anaesthetists Association website: [www.oaa-anaes.ac.uk](http://www.oaa-anaes.ac.uk) and go to the "information for expectant parents" page.

### References

1. Intrapartum care. Care of healthy women and their babies during childbirth. National Collaborating Centre for Women's and Children's Health. Commissioned by the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence. 2007 RCOG Press, London
2. Jones L, Othman M, Dowswell T, Alfirevic Z, Gates S, Newburn M, Jordan S, Lavender T, Neilson JP. Pain management for women in labour: an overview of systematic reviews. Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews 2012, Issue 3. Art. No.: CD009234. DOI: 10.1002/14651858.CD009234.pub2.

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**Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.**

Consultant Anaesthetists, January 2006

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