



Module 7

Coping with the Pain of Labor

Can I Have an Epidural to Help with Labor Pain?

- Yes. It's an effective method of pain relief.
- However, an epidural given early in labor can interfere with the progress of labor and limit your ability to move and change positions.



Klein, M. (2011). Epidural analgesia for pain management: the positive and the negative. In *Promoting normal birth: Research, reflections & guidelines* (Sylvie Donna, Editor). (20-29).Fresh Heart Publishing, First American Edition.

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An Epidural Can Complicate Labor and Birth

An epidural can:

- Lower your blood pressure to a dangerous level;
- Slow down labor and make it necessary to use Pitocin to get labor going again;
- Make the use of forceps or a vacuum extractor more likely;
- Increase the risk for a perineal tear;¹
- Add up to two hours to the second stage of labor (pushing).²

1.Klein, M. (2011). Epidural analgesia for pain management: the positive and the negative. In *Promoting normal birth: Research, reflections & guidelines*. (Sylvie Donna, Editor), (p. 20-29). Fresh Heart Publishing, First American Edition.

2.Cheng, Y.W., Shaffer, B.L., Nicholson, J.M. and Caughey, A.B. (2014). Second stage of labor and epidural use: a larger effect than previously suggested. *Obstetrics and Gynecology* 123(3), 527-535.

An Epidural Can Complicate Labor and Birth

An epidural can:

- ⦿ Interfere with your body's ability to eliminate heat and bring on a fever;
- ⦿ Make it likely that you and your baby will be given antibiotics in case the fever was caused by an infection;
- ⦿ Affect your baby's heart rate;
- ⦿ Make it more likely that your baby will need admission to a special care nursery;
- ⦿ Increase the risk for a cesarean.

To Reduce the Disadvantages of the Epidural

- Try to wait until your cervix is dilated to 4-5 centimeters before having the epidural.
- To help the baby move through your pelvis and rotate for birth, try changing positions slowly while in bed every 20 to 30 minutes during labor. You may need some help.
- You may need to wait an hour or more before you feel you're ready for active pushing.
- You may want to rest or sleep until you feel rectal pressure strong enough to push on your own.
- You may want to wait until the numbness of the epidural wears off before pushing.

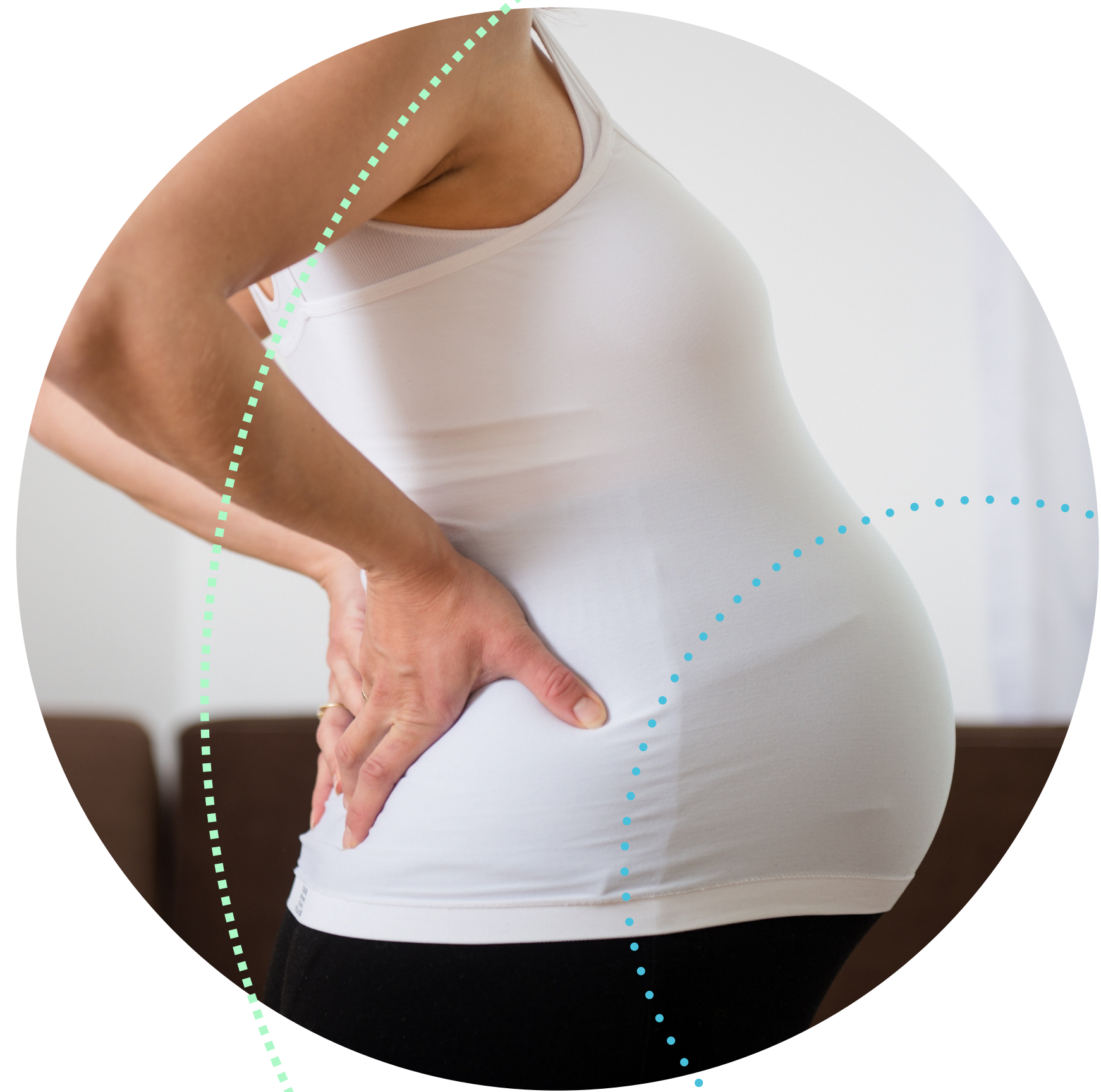
Simkin, P. (2002-2006). Supporting the woman with an epidural. Presentations and Slide Decks. Slide presentation retrieved from <https://www.pennysimkin.com/articles-resources/>

Photo- Shutterstock



There Are Many Comfort Measures to Help You Cope with Labor

- Change positions as often as you need to to make yourself more comfortable.
- Use hot or cold treatments.
- Use counter pressure or rolling pressure for back pain.
- Eat lightly and drink to increase your energy.



There Are Many Comfort Measures to Help You Cope with Labor

You can:

- Use music or aromatherapy;
- Use visualization, rhythmic breathing and relaxation, yoga or hypnobirthing techniques;
- Find out about touch therapy, massage, acupressure or acupuncture, water injections, and TENS (electrical stimulation);
- Use a tub or shower.

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Benefits of **Non-Drug Methods of Pain Relief**

Non-drug methods of pain relief including continuous emotional support from a doula are **beneficial** for mothers and babies and **do not cause harm**.

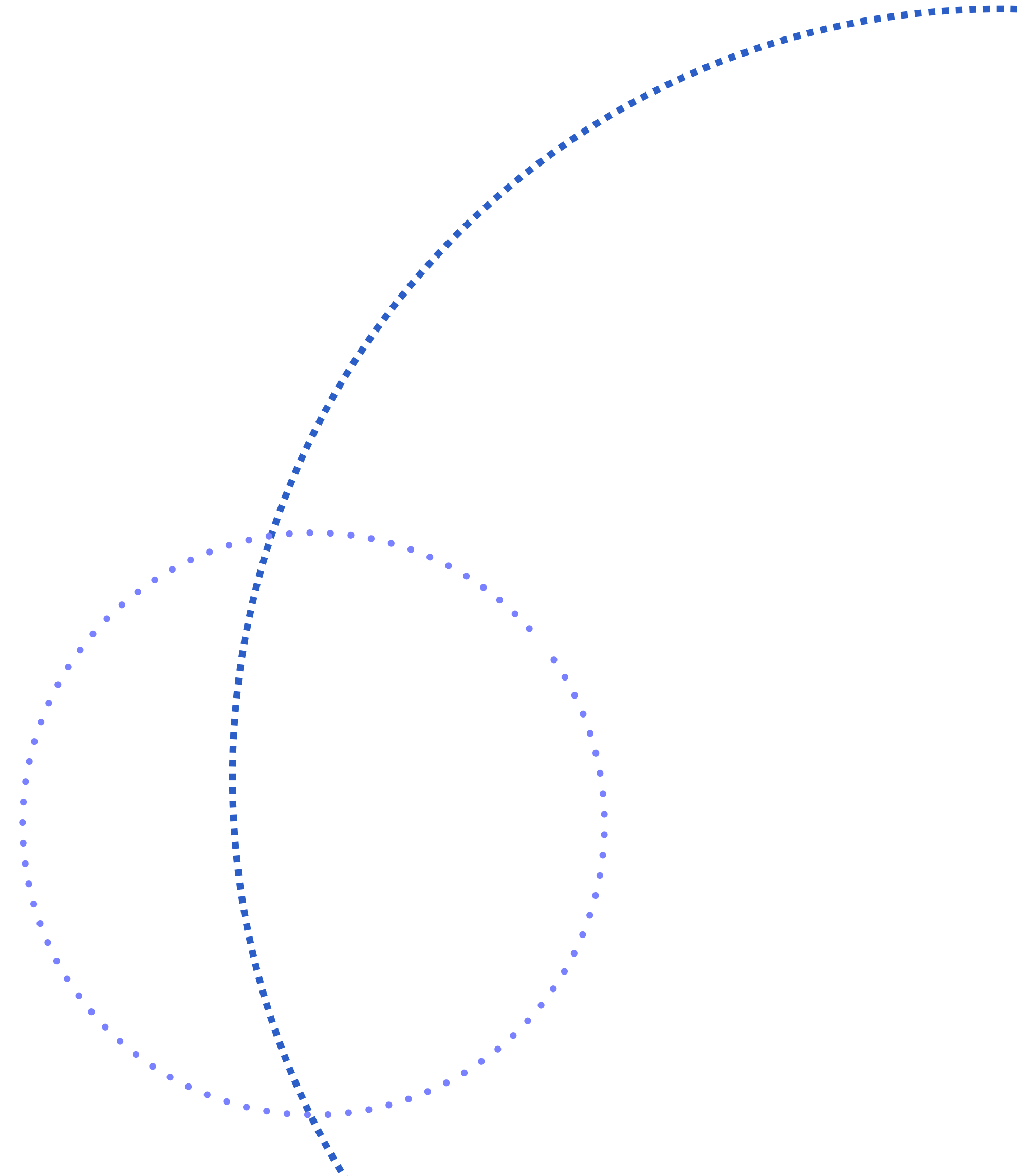


Chaillet, N., Belaid, L., Crochetiere, C., et al. (2014). Non-pharmacologic approaches for pain management during labor compared with usual care: A meta-analysis. *Birth: Issues in Perinatal Care*, (41)2, 122-137.

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Key Points to Review

- Every woman has her own way of coping with the pain of labor. Her choices should be respected.
- An epidural is an effective method of pain relief but it can also complicate labor.
- Using a variety of comfort measures helps mothers to cope with the pain of labor.



Checklist for Parents

- What options for pain relief are you considering?
- Do you think you'd like to try non-drug methods of pain relief?
- Remember that you may change your mind during labor. Stay flexible and you'll find the best way to ease your pain.
- Try to use non-drug methods of pain relief and comfort measures before using drugs for pain relief.
- You may want to use music, aromatherapy, visualization, rhythmic breathing and relaxation, yoga or hypnobirthing techniques.
- Find out about touch therapy, massage, acupressure or acupuncture, water injections, and TENS (electrical stimulation).



Checklist for Parents

If you want an epidural:

- Try to wait until your cervix is dilated to 4-5 centimeters before it is given to you;
- To help the baby move through your pelvis and rotate for birth, try changing positions slowly while in bed every 20 to 30 minutes during labor. You may need some help;
- When you are fully dilated, you may need to wait an hour or more before you feel you're ready for active pushing.



Checklist for Parents

If you want an epidural:

- You may want to rest or sleep until you feel rectal pressure strong enough to push on your own;
- You may want to wait until the numbness of the epidural wears off before pushing;
- With an epidural you may need up to three hours to push your baby out.



Resources for Mothers

- ◎ [BirthTOOLS.org](#)
Prenatal Shared Decision-Making for Analgesia and Anesthesia in Labor
- ◎ [The Birth Facts](#)
Medications and Their Impact on Labor and Birth
- ◎ [National Childbirth Trust, U.K.](#)
Pain Relief During Labour



Resources for Mothers

- ◎ **American College of Nurse Midwives**
Share With Women, Epidural Analgesia,
Using Water for Labor and Birth
- ◎ **Childbirth Connection**
Cascade of Interventions
- ◎ **Choices in Childbirth**
Straight Talk on Epidurals for Labor

