

Different Ways to Manage Labour Pain



Many women want to have children, but dread the pain of labour. For around 200 years now, doctors have been experimenting with [pain management](#) techniques to make the ordeal easier for the expectant mother.

Labour analgesia goes a long way back in history.

In 1847, James Young Simpson administered ether to a woman with a deformed pelvis during childbirth. In 1853, John Snow administered chloroform to Britain's Queen Victoria during the birth of her eighth child, Prince Leopold. Finally, in 1950, neuraxial techniques were introduced for pain relief in labour.

Here are some of the different methods of pain relief that are available to women today.

Relaxation techniques

A woman can make use of the following relaxation techniques to deal with labour pain:

- Calm breathing
- Aromatherapy
- Reflexology
- Acupressure

Entonox

Nitrous oxide has been used for over a century as an analgesic. Entonox is a colourless and odourless gas mixture which consists of 50 percent oxygen and 50 percent nitrous oxide (laughing gas).

The Entonox apparatus consists of a cylinder, mouthpiece, mask and tubing. It is simple to use. The patient has to start inhaling the gas as soon as she feels a contraction coming on, and continue breathing in the gas until it passes. Entonox provides analgesia within 20-30 seconds of inhalation, with maximum effect after about 45 seconds. It wears off in minutes and can be used any time during labour.

Benefits of Entonox:

- Simple and easy to use.
- Self-administration gives the patient some control.
- It does not harm the baby, in fact it gives the baby extra oxygen.

Epidural

This is the most standard and effective method of pain relief. It has to be performed by an anaesthesiologist. In this procedure, a thin catheter (plastic tube) is passed into the epidural space, which is just outside the membrane that surrounds the spinal cord and spinal fluid. Through this catheter, pain relieving drugs are injected to numb the nerves that cause pain during labour. To keep the epidural working throughout the labour, a pump is attached to the epidural, to give the required dosage of drugs throughout labour. Setting up the epidural takes about 15-30 minutes.

Benefits of Epidural:

- It provides effective pain relief during labour.
- It can provide effective pain relief for emergency C-section operations, thereby avoiding the complications associated with general anaesthetics.
- Contrary to popular belief, it does not cause [back pain](#).

Most women are suitable for this form of pain relief, however there are some cases in which epidurals are avoided:

- Maternal haemorrhage.
- Maternal septicaemia.
- [Infection](#) at the site.
- Clotting disorders.
- Neurological disorders.

Water birth

Water birth, or hydro-birth as it is also known, entails delivering the baby in a pool of warm water. The patient enters the pool of water in the active phase of labour and delivers the baby there.

Benefits of Water Birth:

- Water acts as a muscle relaxant.
- It refreshes and rejuvenates the mother, making her more co-operative as well.

*Data courtesy: Dr. Smruti Bhonsle, Consultant Anaesthetist, Hinduja Healthcare Surgical, Khar.

*Image courtesy: ©Shutterstock

*Reference:<http://healthmeup.com/news-healthy-living/different-ways-to-manage-labour-pain/35549>