

# Natural & Medical forms of pain relief

## Smell

- Clary sage – to support labour and encourage regular contractions. Eucalyptus – for pain relief and nasal congestion.
- Frankincense – to help with high anxiety, tension and hyperventilation. Calms & steadys.
- Jasmine and rose – to alleviate anxiety and depression
- Lavender – to alleviate anxiety, to aid relaxation and to prevent headache. Also has pain killing properties, a natural anaesthetic.
- Lemon and mandarin – to enhance mood, uplift and energise.
- Peppermint – to help with nausea and vomiting
- Chamomile – to help with anxiety.

## Hot water bottle

The warmth against your lower back can be very soothing and aid relief in labour. Contraction pain is essentially muscle fatigue, in clinical terms – lactic acid build up so a hot water bottle will help disperse it.

## Tens machine

A method of pain relief where 4 electrodes are attached to your back, either side of your spine. It is completely harmless with no adverse effects to you or baby. You are in control of electrical impulses which travel along your spinal cord to the brain where they compete to block any feeling of pain. TENS also stimulates the release of endorphins, raising them up! Start early in your labour!

## Bath, shower and Birth pool

At a point when every part of you needs soothing, the rests in between contractions can be harder to find and what's around you feels distracting or intrusive, a bath or birth pool can help you feel safe, uninterrupted and enclosing your concentration on your bodys cues is all there is to do. Labour in the pool or bath can become easier, less painful, more comfortable and more efficient. You will feel weightless and able to move with ease, privacy and letting go are well provided for in this space.

## Rebozo

Ease muscle tension by using a rebozo to 'shake the apples' on the bottom or calves. See [www.spinningbabies.com](http://www.spinningbabies.com) or our resource sheet on biomechanics of birth



The warmth of the water reduces adrenalin secretion and relaxes the muscles' says Michel Odent. Water can also induce alpha brain waves, creating a state of mental relaxation, and relaxation in turn brings on dilation.

### **Relaxing your jaw, relaxes your cervix**

Tension in your jaw will replicate as tension in your pelvic floor. Don't clench your teeth. Soft mouth = soft cervix. Bring your attention to your jaw, blow out raspberries and open your mouth to help release any tension.

An Instagrammer called Naked doula also refers to this as ' Floppy mouth, floppy fanny'!!

### **Touch**

Though gestures of touch in labour can be met with a firm ' leave me alone', the reason we so often see people being touched in labour is because for many it is comforting and acts as a form of distraction to the sensations being experienced. As little as five minutes of gentle or firm touch by someone you trust is enough to release a strong influx of oxytocin and your natural endorphins vital to birth.

**Sacrum** - We have nerves close to the surface of our skin at the sacrum area – at the bottom of our spine. Holding and putting pressure on this area in labour and birth can be a great source of relief – a natural epidural.

**Hips, Shoulders and pelvis** – having someone hold these areas of your body can really anchor you. Allowing you to focus on the moment feeling grounded and supported.

**Breathing** - Breath is less about a technique. You will find your rhythm in your labour and birth but its key to pay attention to your breath and notice a pattern in it. With no distraction or resistance, breathing deeply and slowly will feel like a need – like your body's way of getting your attention. Listen to it and feel it. It will help to focus you and gauge the phase of your labour.

### **Benefits of using a breathing technique :**

- Stimulates the vagus nerve which : Activates the parasympathetic nervous system – associated with regulating the body's unconscious actions – like birth, which occur when the body is at rest.
- Helps produce oxytocin
- Aids relaxation

- Relieves pain
- Contributes to a sense of feeling calm and in control
- Helps to feel grounded to reconnect to yourself

### **Surrender**

To surrender is to give yourself to the flow of things as they are and not judge yourself or the situation. It is accepting that what is happening is your path, and you can choose to walk it calmly, which brings peace or resist it, which causes pain.

When you are trying to control birth, you are trying to use your brain to do the work, but birth is not intellectual. It is a physical and emotional experience that is as much a part of your body as breathing. Surrendering to birth means turning off your (neo cortex/thinking brain) mind and allowing your body to steer the process. Step back to premature/mammalian thinking and nature to feel protected against all possible stimulants of the neo cortex. Ie : language, light, feeling observed.

### **Power of thought**

Birth is 80% mind & 20% physical as quoted by Sally Ann Beresford, Birth Doula. The word PAIN versus DISCOMFORT. Your surges are clever and productive. They are purposeful, natural, involuntary and strong. They are not bigger than you, they are you. Your body will never give you more than you can cope with. Surges will feel like intense pressure and hard work but the work will take you somewhere.

### **Environment**

The normal physiological processes in an active birth are enabled as much as possible to unfold without disturbance to let your birth progress naturally in its own time and rhythm. While most births can be expected to progress normally, there is also the reassuring awareness that medical pain relief can be considered at any time should the need arise.

Labour and birth are completely involuntary, the same as pooing and weeing! The uterus contracts spontaneously, first to open the womb and then to give birth to the baby. This all happens without our conscious control, stimulated by hormones produced in our hypothalamus or old brain! The cocktail of hormones are referred to as love hormones and to produce them, we must feel safe, warm, unobserved, in a darkened room, comfortable, and in a familiar environment where you feel free to make loud noises, move and feel relaxed.

## **Positions**

Being upright and active helps to shimmy that baby down into the world! Think upright, forward and open (UFO) as you move around your space however feels best.

Moving in the way your body tells you to can help you stay comfortable, distracted and encourage optimal position without a single thought!

Here are some positions you can try if you can't quite work out how to get comfy!

- Use a Birth ball to sit up on; rock back and forth or in a figure of eight.
- Lean over a bed/chair and sway side to side.
- Get on all fours and rock back and forth.
- To rest, try getting on your knees and leaning forward with your arms crossed on a birth ball or chair.

## **Medical pain relief**

### **Gas and Air/ Entonox**

A combination of 50% nitrous oxide & 50% oxygen – laughing gas. This is the most common form of pain relief. Begin to inhale as a contraction starts. Lasts for 60 seconds, taking the edge of any pain without completely eradicating it. Can be very dehydrating and alter normal state of consciousness and disconnected from labour. Approaching full dilation to transition is most helpful to use then. You have control how much to take in. Can be used in homebirth. High feeling can make you feel dizzy and cause nausea.

### **Opiates – Pethidine & Meptazinol**

Powerful narcotics that act on the nerve cells in the brain and spinal cord to alter your perception of pain. The pain impulses are present but the sensations may be modified. Injection to the thigh or buttock. A low dose can have a relaxant effect which may improve cervical dilation in cases of a slow or ineffectual dilation due to anxiety and tension in reaction to the pain. Can be used at a home birth. Disadvantages – alters pain perception but alters consciousness, some women feel they lose control, courage and confidence.

Nausea is common and often given with another drug – tranquilizer to quell the nausea. This can prevent you from giving birth actively, increasing the likelihood of needing other interventions.

Pethidine can lower blood pressure which may result in faintness and dizziness. Drowsiness may interfere with your active participation in the birth and psychological interaction with your partner and family.

These drugs do cross the placenta and can have an adverse effect on your baby.

In early labour the mother's system helps to remove the pethidine from the baby's blood via the placental circulation whereas later is more likely to remain in the baby's bloodstream after birth and take longer to clear. This leads to a drowsy, sluggish baby possibly having sucking issues at birth, disturbing the breastfeeding experience.

### Epidural

Standard - A local or regional anaesthetic (morphine & other narcotic drugs) which is injected by a skilled anaesthetist into the lower spine to block the nerve fibres that transmit pain sensations from the uterus.

Hospitals offer a low dose epidural that you are in control of either by the push of a button or on request every 60-120mins. This will allow you to feel your legs and able to move around, possibly stand or be on all fours on the bed. Epidural can cause nausea and extreme itchy on your body plus shivering.

Spinal epidural – No top ups are given and used in late labour, possibly for instrumental deliveries and caesarean birth. Quality of pain block is stronger with a more rapid effect. It anaesthetises the uterus, vagina and perineum.

When successful, epidural is the most effective form of pain relief. An epidural can be very helpful in a prolonged labour if the discomfort becomes intolerable or if the mother is exhausted, enabling rest or sleep. In this case, a syntocinon drip may also be used to encourage dilation if agreed of course. Sometimes this break may enable the birthing person to recover sufficiently to regain energy for 2nd stage and birthing the baby with strength and feeling. An epidural does not affect your mental state, you are conscious and alert. Epidurals reduce anxiety and fear so can help progress labour along. Can be topped up so consistent pain relief is available. Helpful in forceps delivery as they eliminate pain and reduce trauma. Epidurals lower blood pressure.

## **Disadvantages of an epidural**

Remember to bear in mind that if you have control of your dosage, you can help to minimise the potential risks/disadvantages of epidural.

Temporary paralysis of the pelvic muscles removes the natural stimulus for the baby's head to turn in the pelvic canal and reduces the mothers urge to bear down to birth. The pushing reflex can be prohibited and forceps delivery or caesarean becomes more likely.

Malpresentations are more likely with epidurals as the mother cannot help to position the baby with her instinctive movements as she would normally and the pelvic muscles are less effective. This increases the chance of an instrumental delivery or a c-birth.

Because a woman on an epidural does not breathe as heavily as she would if feeling contractions, she loses a natural way of cooling her body by exhaling. As a result, a rise in body temperature and potentially unnecessary treatment with antibiotics.

Sometimes the anaesthetist may be able to achieve only partial blockage of sensation so pain or pressure may be felt in one segment.

The needle may penetrate the dura causing leakage of the spinal fluid causing severe headaches after birth.

Blood pressure can fall and also placental blood flow, potentially resulting in less oxygen to baby and increasing foetal distress. Every woman having an epidural is required to be on an intravenous drip to top up the volume of blood.

Injury to the lower spine & pelvic joints can occur with an epidural.

## **References & Important reads & youtube to watch:**

1. <https://www.nhs.uk/pregnancy/labour-and-birth/what-happens/pain-relief-in-labour/>
2. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lt-8PnrfRyg>
3. <https://sarahbuckley.com/epidurals-risks-and-concerns-for-mother-and-baby/>