

Nitrous Oxide

Alternate Pain Management During Labor

What is nitrous oxide?

Nitrous oxide is used for labor pain. It is a mixture of 50 percent nitrous gas and 50 percent oxygen that is inhaled through a mask. It is widely used in Europe for pain management in labor and is gaining popularity in the United States.

How does nitrous oxide work?

Nitrous oxide is delivered to you by a mask. You will hold your own mask to your face and inhale the gas mixture for about 30 seconds before a contraction begins. Inhaling nitrous oxide before the contractions starts helps the gas to reach its peak effect at about the same time your contraction is its strongest. This provides the greatest relief.

Will my nurse administer nitrous oxide?

The gas is self-administered - breathing it in as you feel the need. Once you decide you want to use it, your care provider will order it and a member of the nursing staff will come to your room, set up the machine and show you how to use it.

Does nitrous oxide have any side effects?

Some women have reported nausea after prolonged use. Additional nausea medication maybe used to ease the nausea if that happens. It may also cause some unsteadiness or dizziness.

Can I be out of bed and still use nitrous oxide?

You may be out of bed as long as you feel steady on your feet and you have assistance from a staff member or responsible family member if you desire. Our main goal is to prevent you falling and injuring yourself or your baby.

Is extra monitoring required?

Nitrous oxide does not increase the monitoring required any more than any other medications we offer for pain management in labor/birth.

Can I use nitrous oxide and have intravenous narcotics at the same time?

No. The combination of intravenous narcotics and nitrous oxide could slow down your breathing. If you receive a narcotic at some point in your labor, you must wait two hours to begin using nitrous oxide. You must wait 15 minutes after your last inhalation of nitrous oxide to use an intravenous narcotic.

Continued on reverse

Are there any reasons I could not use Nitrous Oxide?

You cannot use nitrous oxide if:

- you cannot hold your own face mask
- you have received a dose of intravenous narcotics in the past two hours
- you have pernicious anemia or a B12 deficiency for which you take B12 supplements for
- you have a rare medical condition which a member of the OB team assesses when they speak with you
- you have a history of middle ear surgery
- certain respiratory conditions as determined by your provider
- you are under the influence of drugs or alcohol

Are there any effects on the baby?

There are no known effects on the baby. However, there could be theoretical risks to nitrous oxide, similar to most other pain relieving medication used during pregnancy. Nitrous oxide is the only pain relief method used for labor that is cleared from the body through the lungs, so as soon as you pull the mask away, the effects from the gas are gone within a few breaths.

Do I have to choose between either using nitrous oxide or having an Epidural?

No. Some women may use Nitrous Oxide as well as having an epidural placed under the direction of your care provider

There are approximately 175 institutions nationwide that use nitrous oxide as a pain relief option to laboring women and we are pleased that we were able to offer this option to you!