

Pain Relief in Labor and Delivery

The amount of pain one woman feels in labor will differ from other women. Pain depends on many things, such as the size and position of the baby and the strength of the contractions.

Medications and anesthesia in labor may affect labor progress and breastfeeding. Babies exposed to medications or anesthesia may be sleepy or have problems sucking.

Medications last in a newborn's system longer than in an adult's.

Use of medication during labor or a cesarean section may be needed to relieve suffering and allow recovery to happen with less pain. Suffering in labor may also affect labor progress and breastfeeding.

Dosing and the timing of medications may make a difference. Ask your doctor about the specific medications he or she may prescribe and their effects on labor progress, risk of cesarean delivery, and effects on the newborn and breastfeeding.

All patients admitted to the Labor and Delivery unit at Sparrow Hospital receive an assessment by an anesthesia nurse or doctor. This is standard procedure and does not necessarily mean you need anesthesia medication, such as an epidural.

The best chance of baby-led breastfeeding initiation starts with a spontaneous vaginal delivery without medication followed by immediate skin to skin contact.

Non-pharmacologic Pain Relief Strategies:

Labor without medication can help the labor be faster and result in healthier and more alert mothers and newborns. The following suggestions have helped other women have a medication-free birth.

Be involved in your care: Take childbirth classes with your partner to learn what might work for you.

In labor, stay active, use breathing and relaxation, water, and massage, and have continuous support focused on you and your needs. These methods especially have been shown to reduce labor pain and improve outcomes for mothers and newborns.

Decide to have a positive attitude about labor. Labor is a normal process. It is the work a woman does to deliver her baby. Each contraction moves you closer to meeting your baby.

A birthing ball can help with movement and positioning.

Shower spray can help you feel the pain less. Try the water on your back if you have back pain.

Music and a calm, quiet room may help with relaxation.

Limit visitors and onlookers during labor to help you focus and relax.