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*Information for pregnant and labouring women*



# **Pain relief**

## **During Labour**

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*best wishes for the birth of your baby.*

*Sincerely  
The Staff of the  
Maternity Ward at Regionshospitalet Herning and Holstebro*

**Pain relief during labour**  
Regionshospitalet Herning

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## **Pudendal Block**

The pudendal block is applied during the pushing period and numbs the perineum when the child's head is born at the very end. The distending feeling in the perineum and the vagina reduces. The pudendal block also numbs the area if it is necessary to perform an episiotomy or to suture a rupture after labour. If the anaesthesia has not been applied before labour then it is also possible to apply it after labour. The pudendal block is applied through injection with a local anaesthetic remedy about 5 cm (about 2 inches) inside the vagina, close to the pudendal nerve. The needle is led to that spot through a safety tube. It takes about a minute to apply a pudendal block and the effect starts after 5 minutes.

### **Side effects**

The anaesthesia can initially reduce the urge to push, so therefore we would prefer to apply the block when the pushing period has started properly, so that you have a feeling of what it is like to push during labour. For these reasons there might be an increased risk for using a contraction-stimulating drip or a vacuum delivery. Some women might experience sensory disturbance, typically in one leg for about 24 hours after labour. This is due to the anaesthesia spreading to your leg, but it will disappear after a short period of time.

## **Local Anaesthesia**

If a pudendal block has not been used then a local anaesthetic can be applied in the perineum before labour to relieve some of the distending feeling in the perineum. If you have to be sutured after labour, local anaesthetics can be used with an injection. When you have a small tear it can be done with local anaesthetic spray or gel. The spray will sting a bit when applied. The anaesthetic will make sure that you cannot feel the pain of being sutured but you will be able to feel that you are being touched. There are no side effects with ordinary dosages of local anaesthetic.

## **You Can Do Something**

Giving birth is different from woman to woman. Women are different, so is the experience of giving birth and also the need for pain relief. The experience of the body's opening for the child does not only depend on the physical aspects. Anxiety and nervousness can amplify the pain, whilst information, being calm and present can reduce the experience of pain.

It has been proven that both the midwife and father's presence in the delivery room increases the mother's feeling of security and reduces the need for pain relief. Women that have attended antenatal classes also use less pain relief resources.

Unfortunately you are not able to predict how it is going to be or feel but perhaps you will have some expectations to the process.

If you have given birth before, then you may know how a birth can be experienced. However your next birth can differ, as there are no two births alike. We will do everything we can to meet your needs and wishes, no matter how you feel about labour and which wishes you might have for pain relief during labour.

First of all it is important that you know that you can do something yourself, so that you can handle the process that is happening to your body during labour.



### Before Labour

- Your stamina matters for your labour process. Labour is a physical performance and you can handle labour better, if you are in good physical shape. A thirty-minute workout every day would make a difference for your labour process.
- Controlled breathing during labour is important. Good controlled breathing makes sure that your blood gets oxygenated properly. For many, controlled breathing helps to stay focused and relaxed. The midwife will help you control your breathing during labour, but it is also good to train your breathing and relaxation during your pregnancy. We have made a sound clip for you so that you can train your breathing. Search on Google for "Herning fødsel lydfil".
- Be prepared mentally and physically. It will make you feel more secure, if you know what is going on, and have had an opportunity to discuss your wishes and expectations. Talk to your midwife and use the various offers within the pregnancy and family preparation.

- Intermittent sensory disturbance in a leg or hip can occur after an epidural block. This might feel like a whirling sensation. This will eventually disappear after a couple of days or a couple of weeks. Lasting sensory disturbance occurs rarely (1 out of 13.000 pregnant women).
- Research shows that breast-feeding can be delayed due to an epidural block.
- Infection or an accumulation of blood at the epidural catheter is a rare complication (1 out of 100.000 births with an epidural block). Infection and bleeding can, in worst-case scenario, cause meningitis or paralyses. Therefore it is important to treat the symptoms that might occur as early as possible. Symptoms such as sensory disturbance and pain. Paralyses after an epidural block occurs seldomly with a woman in labour.

## Side effects

- Most will experience pins and needles on the stomach or thighs.
- Your legs can feel heavy, but with the technique we use, most will be able to stand up.
- As the block also numbs your bladder, some will experience that they cannot urinate. Therefore it might be necessary to have a small tube leading up to your urinary bladder in order to empty the bladder, while the block is working. The midwife will do this procedure.
- Some experience itchiness as a side effect to the pain relieving substance Sufentanil.
- A drop in blood pressure can occur. The most common symptom of this is nausea and uneasiness. Increasing your saline drip can relieve this or medicine can be given to counteract the block's effect on your blood pressure.
- Your body temperature can increase with 1 centigrade and this does not necessarily mean that you have an infection. However it is not always easy to determine, so in such case we will give you some antibiotics, just to be sure.
- Few (about 1 %) will experience a headache after the process. This is treated effectively.
- Labour with an epidural block usually takes more time than an ordinary birth and therefore it is usually necessary with a contraction-stimulating drip.
- There is a higher percentage of vacuum deliveries when having an epidural block.
- Back-pains can occur after labour but there is not an increased risk of this after an epidural block. However there can be some tenderness afterwards where the epidural catheter has been placed.

## During Labour

- Firstly – the most part of the labour consists of the breaks between the contractions, and here, most women do not experience pain.
- It is important that you are rested and have had something to eat, so that your body can work effectively during labour. It is a good idea to get some rest and something to eat in the beginning of the labour.
- Let the body do its work and say "yes". Be confident, relax and breathe deeply and slowly. Imagine that your body is opening itself for the baby every time you are having a contraction.
- Movement helps labour and reduces pain so move about. You can move about and stand in various positions, even though your child's pulse has to be supervised with a CTG machine.
- Praise, touching and caring from the labour-helpers means a lot when experiencing how your body handles labour and this is possible in our delivery rooms.

During labour the body activates its own sort of morphine (endorphin), which functions as a pain relief. The non-medical forms help to activate these substances. For some this is enough pain relief but others need medical pain relief. In the following pages you will get an explanation of the different methods.

## Massage

Massage helps e.g. on your loin. Your companion can be a good support and it is a good idea to practice before hand. There is no method that is the *best* method to give a massage. Some feel that the best method is a light touch, and others feel that a harder massage or a constant pressure, e.g. above the loin or the sacrum, is the best method.

## Warm water

Warm water can be used as a pain relief at home and at the delivery room. At the beginning of labour it can be nice to take a warm shower. The showerhead can be directed to that spot on your body where the contractions feel most intense. It can be a great help to take a bath when the contractions become stronger. It relieves pain, relaxes you and gives you freedom to move. When the midwife has assessed that everything is normal, then you can stay in the warm water for as long as you wish. You can also give birth in the warm water. Unfortunately you cannot have a warm bath if you or your child need extra supervision, e.g. if the amniotic fluid is green or your blood pressure is too high.



Side 6

## Technique

The epidural catheter is a thin (1 mm) plastic tube, which is placed between two thoracic vertebrae in the lower part of your back after a local anaesthetic injection. The catheter is placed in the so-called epidural space, which surrounds your vertebrae's membrane. Usually it does not hurt more than having a normal drip applied in your hand. The epidural block is administrated whilst you are positioned in a sitting position or in a recovery position. The anaesthesiologist will decide the position.

You will be able to lie on your back afterwards. Before the administration you will be given saline through a drip.

## Effect

The effect can take up to 10-15 minutes to work, once the catheter is placed. A lot of the pain will go away but you will not be pain-free. A pump will be attached to the catheter, and it will continuously administrate pain-relieving medicine. Some might have a need for extra dosages, besides the dosages that the pump administrates. The medicine is a mixture of a local anaesthetic (Naropin), and a morphine-like substance (Sufentanil). Before the morphine is administrated then you are given a test dose (Lidocain). One can settle with strong diluted mixture as the two medicines amplify each other's effect. Therefore the medicine has no side effects on the child. The epidural block works best on the pain that stems from the uterus. The effect on the pain during the last part of labour, which is caused by a dilated pelvic floor and vagina, is somewhat less. This does not hurt.

Side 11

## Epidural Block

The epidural block is applied between two of your thoracic vertebrae and is administered by an anaesthesiologist. The block can be applied from when you are well into your labour process and until your cervix is nearly completely open. However you might have to wait some time before the anaesthesiologist can come, if he/she is engaged at another ward at the hospital and he/she has to prioritize his/her work assignments.



The following information about the epidural block has been drawn up in cooperation with consultant Max Povey from the Anaesthesia Ward:

### Appliance

The Epidural block is mostly used to relieve pain, but it can also have a positive effect on certain illnesses that the mother might have. Preeclampsia, diabetes or high blood pressure can reduce the placenta's function and therefore also reduce the oxygen supply to the child. This can be counteracted with an epidural block. Also the block can relieve pain and therefore prevent further increase in the blood pressure that might already be high. If a C-section should be necessary then the anaesthesia can be administered through a well-functioning epidural catheter.

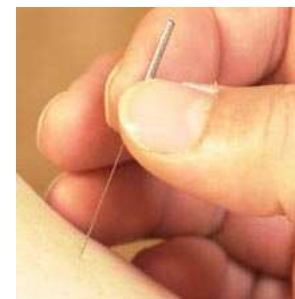
Side 10

## Warm Gel Bags

Warm Gel Bags are applied where the contractions feel most intense. They can be applied everywhere on your body and can be used by everybody. The warmth relieves your muscles of pain and relaxes them. At home you can use a hot-water bottle or an electric heating pad. You can also use a wet towel that has been warmed in the microwave for 2-3 minutes (or use hot water). The towel must be placed in a thin plastic bag to keep the water inside. Finally you must wrap the towel in some sort of fabric e.g. a pillowcase and then you can apply it to the aching part of your body.

## Acupuncture

Acupuncture can be used throughout labour. Acupuncture is done with the help of thin, small needles that are placed in different acupuncture spots on your body, depending on where you can feel the contractions coming from. It usually does not hurt to have the needles applied. You will feel a small prick and a whirling sensation in your skin. The effect of acupuncture starts after a couple of minutes. The effect is relaxation and can relieve pain, but it can also make you drowsy which can help you sleep in between contractions. Preferably the needles need to stay on your body for 20-30 minutes. Some of the needles can stay on your body during labour but can be removed if they feel uncomfortable. Acupuncture can be combined with other forms of pain relief e.g. a bath. There are no side effects from acupuncture for you or your baby.



Side 7

### **TENS (transcutaneous electric nerve stimulation)**

At the beginning of labour TENS can be a good pain relief, especially for the loin area. Small electrodes are placed on your skin, where the contractions feel most intense. The machine will then send a small current to your body and you can decide how strong the current is. This will give you a tingling, vibrating and a light pricking sensation. There are no side effects from TENS for you or your baby.

### **Sterile Water Papules**

Sterile water papules can be used throughout labour. It can relieve pain from your loin and also from the lower part of your stomach. A small amount of sterile water is injected beneath your skin. Typically you are injected in four areas. With each injection there will be a small amount of swelling. The injection feels like a strong burning or stinging sensation, which can be compared to a bee sting. The pain from the injection can be relieved, by placing a small ice cube on the skin before the injection. The pain lasts for about 30 seconds but the papules work quickly thereafter and you can count on being relieved from pain for a couple of hours. There are no side effects from sterile water papules for you or your baby.

### **“Cocktail”**

“Cocktail” is a combination of painkillers, which we can provide for you. It consists of 1g Pinex/Panodil, a sleeping tablet (10 mg Stilnoct) and an injection with a medication, which makes your uterus relax (Bricanyl). The combination can be given to pregnant women who are at the beginning of labour and are having trouble with sleeping or getting rest. It can help during the rest of the labour as you can get some rest and gather strength to the work that lies ahead.

If you and the midwife agree upon the solution of having a “cocktail”, then you can receive the injections at the hospital and take the pills at home, or you and your companion can stay and sleep at the maternity ward.

All medicine in the mother’s bloodstream will also affect the child and the “cocktail” will also make the child drowsy. The effect, though, will stop after a couple of hours.

### **Morphine**

Morphine is given as an injection. It can be given during the early part of labour – like a “cocktail” – if the beginning of labour has been a long process and you need some rest. To prevent any side effects to the baby, morphine is not given, if we estimate that there is less than 4 hours to the actual birth. Morphine can relieve some of the pain, makes you relax and sleepy, so that you can get some rest.

### **Side effects**

Morphine can cause itchiness, nausea and vomiting. Your child will also receive some of the morphine that is injected and if you give birth within a short period of time after it is administrated (3-4 hours) then it could make your child sluggish at birth and affect the child’s breathing. We would then give an antidote to the child so that it can counteract the morphine.

The child can also experience sluggishness a couple of days after the birth and have a reduced sucking ability. Therefore it can also make it harder to start breast-feeding. The maternity ward however is attentive towards this and offers special support in these situations.