



Methods for PAIN RELIEF during labour

AT HOSPITAL CLÍNICO UNIVERSITARIO
VIRGEN DE LA ARRIXACA



This information is intended to guide and help you in your child's birth. If after reading this document you have any doubts or need any clarification, please do not hesitate to ask your midwife or doctor.



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This and more information about childbirth at La
Arrixaca is available on the website
www.murciasalud.es/partonormal



PAIN RELIEF DURING LABOUR

Labour pain is something that worries many women. Most of them ask for some type of pain relief.

At La Arrixaca we try to meet, as far as possible, the expectations of every woman concerning labour pain relief.

Our aim is to reduce or eliminate pain during labour. There is no evidence that labour pain could be beneficial for the mother or the baby.

On the contrary, pain, fear and anxiety trigger a series of reflex responses which may produce negative effects on the mother, the baby and the labour process.

Professionals assisting the expectant mother during childbirth are responsible for providing different types of pain relief methods that can be applied. It is the mum-to-be who has to decide which of them to use. That is why it is important to know the relationship existing between the pain and the effective ways to alleviate it.

We can say there are two ways to relieve pain during childbirth: with or without medication. Both can produce good results



PHARMACOLOGICAL METHODS FOR PAIN RELIEF

At La Arrixaca we use several methods to relieve pain during childbirth using drugs. These are:

Epidural analgesia.

This is the most effective method. It consists of injecting some drugs called local anesthetics in the spine. The anesthetic is injected at the level of the spinal cord, outside the membrane called dura mater. This allows us to numb your body from the waist down (legs included) while you remain conscious.

Like with any anesthetic technique, epidural anesthesia has its risks. The ones that may appear after the anesthesia are:

- Lowering of blood pressure.
- Shivering (common).
- Puncture difficult or impossible to perform.
- Headache if the needle or the epidural catheter passes accidentally into the cerebrospinal fluid (very rare).
- Back pain in the puncture area.

Other problems that may appear are:

- Difficulty urinating, nausea and vomiting, intravascular puncture (the drug getting into the bloodstream), insufficient analgesia leading to re-puncture.
- Complications that affect nerve roots (rare). Infections in the epidural space.
- Allergic reactions (very rare).
- Breakage of the needle or catheter

Epidural anesthesia is not possible in all deliveries, in particular when the mother has serious blood coagulation disorders. That is why it is the anaesthetist who will decide in each case to offer the pain relief method that is most suitable for you.

PHARMACOLOGICAL METHODS FOR PAIN RELIEF

At La Arrixaca we use several methods to alleviate pain during childbirth using drugs. These are:

Nitrous oxide.

The use of a mix of 50% nitrous oxide and 50% oxygen is an alternative analgesia in labour. It provides moderate pain relief during labour, though it may cause nausea, vomiting, lightheadedness and affect you remembering the delivery. It has the advantage of being fast-acting (action starts and ends fast), does not accumulate and does not depress uterine contractions.

It is inhaled through a mask or mouthpiece. It can be administered continuously or intermittently (only during contractions). The midwife and/or anesthetist explain its use to the expectant mother. It can be administered until the second stage of labour.

Opioids.

Despite the extensive use of meperidine, its effect appears to be more sedative than analgesic. Meperidine is an opioid drug that crosses the placental barrier and affects the baby, possibly numbing the baby. In the mother it may cause nausea and drowsiness.

Therefore it is only recommended when other possibilities have been exhausted. It is usually associated with drugs to decrease the mother's nausea and feeling sick. The administration of meperidine is not recommended near the time of birth (second stage), and if it is, the pediatrician shall be informed.

NON-PHARMACOLOGICAL METHODS FOR PAIN RELIEF

There are also several ways to relieve labour pain without using drugs:

Immersion in water during dilation.

The use of warm water is an effective method of pain relief during the end of dilation. It is known that if it is used, it reduces the application of epidural anesthesia.

At present, La Arrixaca does not have bathtubs. So, full immersion in warm water is not yet possible. However, it is possible to use the hot water shower, since every dilation area has a bathroom and shower. These bathrooms have special seats where expectant mothers may sit while having a hot water shower.

Sterile water injections.

The injection of sterile water into the lower back skin may relieve pain during childbirth. Injections are made on both sides of the spine. In doing so, momentary itching and pain may appear.

Continuous accompaniment.

If the mum-to-be is accompanied throughout labour, there is less need for analgesia. It also increases the sense of control and autonomy. That is why, at La Arrixaca the expectant mother may be accompanied by a person of her choice, during the whole delivery process.

Freedom of movement.

Freedom of movement throughout delivery helps women to cope better with the pain. Thus the feeling of pain is less. Movements and vertical positions reduce the need for analgesia.

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Birthing balls.

Although there are no studies proving the usefulness of this method for pain relief during labour, in recent years the use of *Fitball* birthing balls has been introduced, trying to improve mobilization of the pelvis and relax the muscles. At La Arrixaca we do not have these balls, but if you bring yours, you may use it.

Relaxation and breathing techniques.

During the preparation for childbirth at your health centre, you may have practiced some of them. Although their effectiveness in the relief of pain is not entirely clear, at La Arrixaca we support people who choose to use this method.

Massage.

Massage and reassuring touch (by your companion during labour) helps you to relax and relieve contraction pain, transmit interest, understanding and provide comfort.