

Medication

If there comes a point in your labour where the methods you have been using no longer seem to meet your needs, there are medicines available.

Entonox

This is a mixture of oxygen and nitrous oxide. You inhale the gas through a mouth piece. It works quickly in about 30–40 seconds. It may make you feel dizzy or sick but this wears off very quickly. You can use it throughout labour and there are no lasting effects on you or your baby.

Pethidine/Morphine/Fentanyl

These opiate drugs are quick acting and can help you relax which is particularly useful when your labour is slow to get going. They also can make you feel sleepy or sick. These drugs pass into the baby's system and can remain for a few days which may initially affect breastfeeding.

Epidural

An epidural is an effective pain relief and is used by many women in labour. It is an injection of local anaesthetic drugs into the lower back to numb the nerves.

You should also read the Te Whatu Ora - Waitematā leaflet '*Epidural pain relief*' as it provides much more detail about this option.

Your choice

Consider what you think will be useful to you in managing labour pain. Discuss your plans with your lead maternity carer. No one can anticipate how their labour will feel; remember that you are free to change your mind once labour has started.

Further information

National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) – Intrapartum care for healthy women and babies (February 2017)

ANZCA (Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists) – Epidurals and childbirth

Te Whatu Ora - Waitematā leaflets:

Your Labour

Epidural pain relief for labour

Water for labour and birth

How you cope with labour pain depends on many factors. These include who is with you in labour; where you labour; how comfortable and relaxed you feel; therapies and medicines you choose; and the way your labour progresses.

Ways to help yourself

- Feeling relaxed and confident will help you to manage your labour better.
- Choose support people who you trust and who make you feel calm.
- Choose an environment that makes you feel safe. It is quite normal for women to be in labour at home.
- Walk and move around and find positions that are comfortable for you.
- Think positively about your body and your ability to give birth.
- Use slow, deep breathing to relax and focus.
- Listen to music that is calming and relaxing.
- Imagine you have your baby safely in your arms.



Water therapy

The use of warm water has been shown to assist with relaxation and reduce the need for pain relief medication. It can be used at home or in the hospital.

If you are thinking of having a water birth, please read our Te Whatu Ora - Waitematā 'Water for labour and birth' leaflet.

Complementary therapies

You are welcome to use complementary therapies such as hypnobirthing, acupuncture, and aromatherapy. There is little clinical evidence about how effective these are, but it is important that you feel comfortable with what works for you.

Complementary therapies are not part of maternity-funded services so you will need to discuss them with your lead maternity carer. You may also need to pay a provider if you choose to pursue them.

Tips for support people

- Keep calm; do not bring your stress or anxiety to the birthing room.
- Practice some simple massage techniques that can bring relief to lower back, feet, legs and shoulders.
- Warm or cold compresses can help release muscle tension, especially in the lower back.
- Take care of yourself; make sure you have snacks and drinks.

