

# Information about Intravenous Fentanyl

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## What is Fentanyl?

It is a drug that is a powerful pain reliever. It is a narcotic like morphine. It is offered to help decrease labor pain. Some women say it takes the edge off the pain and helps them to cope better. It will take most of the pain away but not all of it. Doses that would take away all your labor pain would make you very sleepy, drop your blood pressure and would decrease your ability to breathe. This could be dangerous for you and your baby.

## How is it given?

It is given to you in a way so it is safe for you and your baby.

- ▶ First your nurse puts a small tube in your hand or arm called an intravenous or IV.
- ▶ There are two ways it can be given. Your nurse, doctor, or midwife can give you the fentanyl through the IV tube. The other way is you can give yourself this drug through the IV by using a pump which allows you to control the number of fentanyl doses each hour. It is called a patient-controlled pump. If you are using a pump you cannot give yourself too much of the fentanyl because the pump is set to only allow safe doses over a set time interval.

## Side effects of Fentanyl

- ▶ You may become sleepy and relaxed.
- ▶ Your breathing may slow down. Some women need to be given some oxygen and be watched closely if this happens.
- ▶ You may feel sick to your stomach. This happens less often with fentanyl than with other narcotics.
- ▶ You may feel itchy.

### Side effects cont'd...

- ▶ Fentanyl crosses the placenta and goes to your baby. Your baby may be sleepy and not breathe well at birth or have a lower heart rate. If this happens, your baby may be given a drug that reverses the slowed breathing called Naloxone. Sometimes, if you have needed a large dose of fentanyl, your baby's breathing may have to be watched closely for several hours.
- ▶ Your baby may have some trouble starting breast feeding because she or he is sleepy. You may need more help to get your baby to breast feed. Your nurse and/or lactation consultant will be able to help you with breastfeeding.

## What does it not do?

- ▶ Fentanyl will not take all your pain away.
- ▶ Fentanyl does not give enough pain relief so your doctor or midwife can help your baby being delivered by the use of forceps or vacuum.
- ▶ If your labor is very long or difficult it may not be as effective for pain relief later on. You may need a different form of pain relief such as an epidural. An epidural gives long lasting relief for the entire labour.

**If you have questions, please ask.**