



# Soothing the Pain of Childbirth

[www.bcwomens.ca](http://www.bcwomens.ca)

You are going to have a baby.....you may feel excited, nervous....or scared. As labour and birth get closer, you may have many questions including those that have to do with the pain of labour.

The journey of labour can take many different forms: some mothers have labours that are short while others may be long. Pain is a normal, healthy part of labour. Understanding the reasons your body feels pain during labour and learning how you can best work with your pain throughout labour, will benefit both you and your baby.

## This pamphlet will answer your questions about:

- ✿ the pain of labour
- ✿ how you can prepare for your labour
- ✿ how other people can support and help you
- ✿ questions to ask when considering using medication
- ✿ medications that are available
- ✿ where you can get more information

## How is labour pain different from other kinds of pain?

- ✿ Labour pain increases in strength over time. There is time to adjust and get used to it.
- ✿ During a contraction, the muscles of your uterus gradually tighten and then they slowly relax - each contraction lasts about 30-90 seconds.
- ✿ There is a break between contractions when you can rest.
- ✿ The pain of your labour tells you that your body is working well to birth your baby - it guides you to move, change positions and make noise which helps your labour to progress.
- ✿ During labour, your body produces natural pain relievers called endorphins which have a calming effect.
- ✿ Labour pain has a purpose - you will be rewarded with the birth of your baby!

## How can I best prepare for labour?

### Before birth, set time aside to:

Become familiar with the place where you are going to give birth. Go on a hospital tour and use this time to ask as many questions as you wish about giving birth there. Think about ways that you can make this space more personal and comfortable for you during labour and bring items from home that will help you do this.

Plan your labour support for home and in the hospital. Many women depend on their support persons to keep them on track in labour. Some women choose to hire trained labour support. Once in hospital, you will also benefit from the support, encouragement and skills of your labour and delivery nurses.

***Talk about your choices*** for soothing your pain with your support people, your doctor, midwife and nurses. Be sure they know your needs and preferences.

***Learn and practice coping skills*** with your support people.

Practice will help you feel self-confident and positive throughout your labour. Feeling able to cope in labour will help you relax and feel more satisfied with your birth experience.



Learn about medications and which options are available to you. Discuss with your caregiver, situations that may lead you to use medications and effects of different medications. This information will help you decide if and when you choose to use them.



## What specific coping skills should I learn about and practice?

Every woman's labour and birth experience will be different. Methods for soothing pain that work for one woman may or may not work for you. You may find that one method is not effective at one stage in your labour, but is the perfect remedy at a different stage. The Comfort Kit suggests items you can bring that will help you with your comfort techniques. Be open to variety - be creative if you wish! Think about and try some of the following:

***Relaxation and breathing techniques*** - learn how to work with each contraction and how to relax between them.

***Movement and position changes*** - walking, slow dancing, pelvic rocking, and squatting, sitting, tipping forward while standing or moving to all fours can all be helpful at different times throughout labour.

***Personal coping skills*** - try what has worked for you with other kinds of pain.

***Positive self-talk*** - "I am strong and able to work with my labour"; "I have the strength to deal with anything that happens in labour".

Ask those supporting you to have the same positive outlook.

***Massage techniques/Acupressure/Counterpressure*** - the use of touch, pressure and massage during labour helps relieve pain and promotes relaxation.

***Visualization and focal-point meditation*** - using a rehearsed mental image or a series of images as a focal point during a contraction can be helpful.

***Aromatherapy*** - different fragrances and scents promote relaxation.

***Noise-making*** - chanting, moaning, counting and singing help to focus and relax.

***Meditation and Hypnosis*** - reaching a state of deep relaxation; requires practice and training before labour.

***Music*** - provides a pleasant, personal, relaxing atmosphere.

***Other comfort measures*** - Showers, tub baths, hot or cold compresses.

## Suggestions to pack in your

### “Comfort Kit”

- ✿ Hot/Cold Pack
- ✿ Massage oil or powder for massage
- ✿ Your birth plan
- ✿ Toothbrush and toothpaste
- ✿ Comb or brush and hair elastic
- ✿ Shower cap
- ✿ Large T-shirt, slippers, socks
- ✿ Rolling pin or small paint roller for massage; tennis balls for back massage
- ✿ Sour candies or mints
- ✿ Personalized focal point (a design, photo or object that you find appealing to look at)
- ✿ Bed pillows with colourful pillow slips
- ✿ Favourite juice, herb tea, or popsicles for nourishment
- ✿ Snacks for labour supporters
- ✿ Camera and film
- ✿ Audio tapes of relaxing music
- ✿ Partner’s swim suit (so he or she can accompany you in the shower)
- ✿ Baby’s Best Chance
- ✿ Labour handouts from prenatal classes

## What if labour becomes difficult?

### Ask yourself.....

- ✿ if extra support and encouragement from your support people can help you through this difficult time or,
- ✿ is your labour beyond your ability to cope. If so, should you think about having some medication?

## What should I know if I choose to use medication?

The medications offered can be very helpful but may have side-effects. Ideally, you will use just enough medication to give you the pain relief you need.

Feel comfortable asking questions about the medications from your caregivers.

### You may want to ask:

- ✿ What other choices do I have?
- ✿ How will the medication help?
- ✿ What are the side effects?
- ✿ Is the medication safe for me and my baby?
- ✿ How might it affect my baby’s first hours and days?
- ✿ How else can the medication affect my care (for example, an intravenous, restricted to bed)?



## What medications are available for pain relief?

**Analgesics** - These medications can be given through an injection or an intravenous (Demerol with Gravol, Fentanyl) or by breathing through a face mask (Nitronox).

**Epidural** - a small plastic tube is inserted into your back through a needle. Medication is put into the tube. There are different kinds of epidurals - some restrict you to bed while you may be up and walking with others.

**Local** - an anesthetic (freezing) is injected into the area around your vagina (perineum) at delivery.

## Are there any other options for pain relief?

Two other options that do not use medications are available to relieve pain in early labour, including:

**Transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation” or TENS** - mild electrical currents are sent through small pads placed on your back to give you a comfortable tingling sensation. You need to make arrangements for TENS with your doctor/midwife or physiotherapist before delivery.

**Sterile Water Blocks** - four small doses of sterile water are injected into your lower back to relieve the pain of back labour.

## Where can I get more information...

- ✿ Your Doctor/Midwife
- ✿ Your caregivers for labour
- ✿ BC Women’s Anesthesia Consultation Clinic  
- ask your doctor or midwife for a referral
- ✿ Your Childbirth Educator
- ✿ The Midwives Association of British Columbia  
(604) 736-5976
- ✿ Doula Services Association 604-515-5588  
or website at: <http://doula.com.bcdoulas>
- ✿ Baby’s Best Chance is available:
  - ◆ free from your Community Health Centre
  - ◆ on website:  
[www.healthservices.gov.bc.ca/cpa/publications/babybestchance.pdf](http://www.healthservices.gov.bc.ca/cpa/publications/babybestchance.pdf)
  - ◆ library
  - ◆ for sale at some bookstores
- ✿ Your local library
- ✿ BC Women’s Patient Education pamphlets

If you would like to learn more about labour, birth and parenting, think about attending prenatal classes.

All the prenatal classes are listed on our website:

**[www.bcwomens.ca](http://www.bcwomens.ca)**

Or call: Childbirth Education (604) 875-2169