



Booklet for pregnant women in The Region of Southern Denmark

Pain management & pain relief during childbirth



Region Syddanmark

Pain management & pain relief during childbirth



This booklet is written for you who are about to give birth and for your partner or other close companions whom you wish to be close to you during the birth.

The booklet informs you about pain management during childbirth, and gives you an overview of the different forms of pain relief that are offered at the birthplaces in the Region of Southern Denmark.

The booklet is a supplement to the oral information you receive during pregnancy and during childbirth.

There is a big difference in how a birth is experienced, and therefore your need for pain relief will be different from the needs of another pregnant woman. Based on your wishes and needs, the midwife will support and guide you and / your companion in handling the birth and using pain relief.

Childbirth and pain management

Birth pains are due to labour pains. The physical explanation for the labour pains is that the uterine muscle contracts to open. When a muscle contracts as much as it does during a birth, a message is sent up to the brain, interpreting it as pain. Birth pains, unlike most other pains, are associated with something positive; you bring your child into the world! Birth pains are not constant, there are breaks in between.

Some women do not need actual pain relief during childbirth, as the body during childbirth will release more and more of the body's own pain-relieving hormone (the so-called endorphins). These women find that they can work with the body. This means that the pain can become easier to deal with, even if it becomes stronger as the birth progresses. Using deep and calm breathing and movement during labour is one of the things that can help you deal with these pains.

Some women need help to deal with the labour pains, and others experience labour pains so severe that it is necessary and beneficial to use pain relief.

Feeling secure before and during childbirth

During the birth, it is important to be with people you feel comfortable with. Most people enjoy having their partner / birth partner, or someone they share a close relationship with at birth. If you are nervous and afraid of childbirth, it can aggravate the experience of pain because anxiety leads to tense muscles and poor breathing. This makes it harder to deal with the pain. Therefore, it is important that you feel safe both before and during the birth.

You and your partner/ birth partner can help to create security. You can participate in birth preparation and thus gain knowledge of the course of the birth and the possibilities for help with pain management and forms of pain relief that are at the place where you are going to give birth. You can also talk to your midwife about expectations, desires and concerns before the birth and later with the midwife who is involved in your birth.

Movement and rest

It is good to use your body during childbirth. It can relieve pain and help the baby get further down the pelvis. Some mothers need to be in motion during labour, others prefer to lie on their side, stand on all fours or switch between different positions. You may need to be moving for some time during the birth.

At other times, you may need to rest. During the birth, the midwife will guide you to movements and to changing position when it will be beneficial for your birth process.

Calm breathing and relaxation

Pain can trigger tension throughout the body. Deep and calm breathing can be relaxing, soothing and analgesic.

When the body is relaxed, the uterus gets the best conditions to work effectively.

When you relax and work with the contractions, the cervix opens faster and the baby has a better opportunity to move down through the pelvis.

Music can be relaxing and it is a good idea to bring some music with you, for example, make a playlist with music you like, both rhythmic music and something more calming and de-stressing.

On the following pages, there is a description of the most commonly used forms of pain relief offered at birthplaces in the Region of Southern Denmark.

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Water

- Water can be relaxing and pain relieving
- Water makes the contractions shorter

Water as pain relief for everyone

Most mothers can be offered a hot bath. There are bathtubs in most delivery rooms. If you or your baby needs extra monitoring, for example, if the amniotic fluid is green or you have high blood pressure, it is not always appropriate to use water as pain relief.

This is the process

You can choose between shower and tub. It is best if the water temperature is between 35-37 degrees. If the water is warmer, it can affect the baby. It can also become uncomfortable for you and cause you not to be able to endure being in the bath for as long as you could enjoy.

At the beginning of the birth, when the contractions are not so strong, it can be nice to stand under the hot shower and shower where the pain is felt most. Later, getting in the tub can be relaxing.

While in the bath, you can get other forms of pain relief, such as subcutaneous sterile water injections or acupuncture.

The effect of water

Hot water can be relaxing and the labour pains may feel less. The labour pains can feel shorter, because the pain-relieving effect of water makes the start and end of the labour pains milder. No women experience complete pain relief in water, but many find it easier to get through the labour pains.

Side effects

If the water temperature does not exceed 35-37 degrees, there are no side effects for either you or your child.



Massage and touch

- Has a relaxing and analgesic effect
- The good contact that it is created between you and the person who gives you massage, has a positive effect on the birth process.

Massage can be used for everyone

Everyone can get massage as long as it feels comfortable. Some mothers experience discomfort with massage during contraction. In this case, the massage can be given between contractions.

This is how it is done

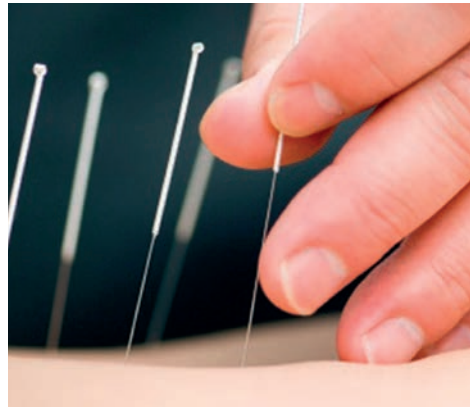
It is the midwife or your partner/birth partner who massages you. We cannot say in advance that a particular way of massaging is best, it depends on what feels better for you. Some women benefit from light touch, others from deeper massage depending on where the pain feels strongest. For example, it can be on the hips, legs or over the loins. You and your birth partner will find out together what is most comfortable for you.

The effect of massage and touch

Massage works especially as a pain reliever for low back pain. In addition, massage and touch have a relaxing effect that helps you cope with the pain.

Side effects

There are no side effects from massage and touch.



Acupuncture

- Can have a relaxing, soothing and analgesic effect
- Are thin needles that are inserted into specific places on the body
- Can be used during the entire birth process

Acupuncture is for everyone

The vast majority of mothers can use acupuncture. Acupuncture is offered at all birthplaces.

This is how it is given

It is the midwife who gives you the acupuncture. Quite thin needles are inserted into different places on the body depending on the desired effect. Acupuncture works within a few minutes and the needles usually sit for approx. 20 minutes. Some needles may remain in place throughout childbirth. The needles can always be removed if they bother.

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The effect of acupuncture

Acupuncture can be used throughout the birth process, and can have a relaxing and analgesic effect. Acupuncture can also be sedative, making it easier to rest between contractions. You do not achieve pain relief, but the pains feel less violent.

Some women become so relaxed during acupuncture treatment that they fall asleep.

Side effects

There are virtually no side effects to acupuncture.

Some women experience discomfort, dizziness and sweat. It is harmless and short-lived. Acupuncture does not affect the child.

gas (Nitrous oxide)

- Has a calming and analgesic effect
- Is easy to use and the effect occurs quickly

Laughter gas is offered at the following birthplaces: Hospitals Lillebælt Kolding, OUH Odense, OUH Svendborg, Sydvestjysk Sygehus Esbjerg. Laughter gas can be used throughout the birth. However, during the press period, it can be difficult to use laughing gas.

This is how it is given

Laughter gas is inhaled into a mask covering the nose and mouth. You can inhale laughter gas during contractions and rest between contractions. If you do so, it will a



calming effect, though it will have a lesser analgesic effect. You can also inhale laughter gas both during and between contractions. In this way, it has both a soothing and analgesic effect.

The effect of laughter gas

The exact mechanism effect is not known, but laughter gas releases some of the body's own painkillers. These substances affect the central nervous system. This achieves a pain-relieving and calming effect.

Laughter gas has a pain-relieving effect after approx. 3 minutes, and the effect continues as long as you keep inhaling it. The effect diminishes in a few minutes, when you stop inhaling it. Many mothers experience that the laughing gas gives good pain relief - some experience little or no positive effect.

Side effects

Laughter gas can cause nausea and dizziness. In some cases, the mother experiences hallucinations. When used without breaks for a long time, some women experience that part of the birth process is hard to remember. The baby gets laughter gas through the placenta. However, there are no known side effects for children whose mothers get laughing gas during childbirth.

Subcutaneous sterile water injections

- Relieves severe low back pain
- Are small amounts of sterile water that is injected under the skin
- Can be laid at any time during the birth and repeated as needed

Sterile water injections for everyone

All mothers can use sterile water injections, and the treatment can be repeated as needed.

This is how it is given

The midwife injects a small amount of sterile water under the skin. There will be a slight swelling on the skin, at each prick. It stings like a bee sting when injected, but the pain subsides quickly. Sterile water injections are used for low back pain, or pain in the lower abdomen. Once the injection is given, you can move around freely.

The effect of sterile water injections About half of the women who are given sterile water injections experience good pain relief. The effect occurs immediately after the injection and lasts for 1 - 1 1/2 hours.

Side effects

It is uncomfortable when the water is injected under the skin, but there are no side effects.

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Epidural

- Is the most effective form of pain relief during birth
- Is a blockade of nerves so you experience little or no pain
- Consists of a local anaesthetic and pain-relieving medicine injected through a catheter during the entire birth.

The vast majority can get an epidural block

The placement of an epidural does not affect the progress of the birth. Therefore, it is recommended that the epidural is put in when you need it. In certain circumstances, it is recommended that the epidural is put in during early labor. A few conditions or diseases make it impossible to use an epidural block.

This is how it is given

An anaesthesiologist places the epidural block. Since the epidural block can cause your blood pressure to drop, you will have your blood pressure measured and a drop placed in your hand before the epidural is applied. Initially, your blood pressure is frequently checked. If your blood pressure drops, you will be given medication via a drip. To ensure that your baby is well, the midwife checks your contractions and the baby's heartbeats using a CTG device.

You can either sit up or lie down on your side with your back curved. It is important that you sit or lie completely still while the epidural is placed, which is why you have to tell the anaesthesiologist if you are get-

ting a contraction during the procedure. First, the doctor washes and localizes the area on the back where the epidural block is to be placed. When the local anaesthetic works, the doctor inserts a needle into the back and inserts a thin plastic tube (an epidural catheter) through the needle to the pain-carrying nerves. After that, the needle is removed and the epidural catheter is fastened with a Band-Aid to your back so you are free to move around. The epidural catheter remains in place during the entire birth, and it is used to administer medication throughout the birth, which happens automatically via a small pump. It usually takes less than 20 minutes to put in the epidural. In some cases, the epidural is not working properly, which means it will have to be adjusted or redone.

This is how an epidural block works

Epidural block is a local anaesthetic in the back. It is placed in the lower back, so that the painful nerves from the uterus and birth canal are blocked just before they reach the spinal cord. The epidural block provides good pain relief in the progressive phase of the birth, and takes some of the pain during the pushing stage. It takes approx. 10-20 minutes from the time the anaesthetic is injected, until it works. The effect lasts 30-60 minutes after the pump is switched off.

Advantages of an epidural

- Mostly provides significant pain relief
- Usually it does not affect your freedom

of movement and lets you walk around with support

- An epidural does not affect the baby during childbirth
- Usually, the epidural can - if needed - be used as anaesthetic for a caesarean section by injecting a higher dose of local anaesthetic into the epidural catheter.

Side Effects

Blood pressure drops: Some women experience that their blood pressure drops and becomes too low, which can be treated with medication.

Reduced strength in the legs: In most cases, it is possible to provide pain relief without affecting the muscle strength of the legs. However, some women may experience decreased strength in the legs. It will eventually disappear but since it presents with varying strength, you cannot walk without support as long as the epidural is in effect.

Problems with urination: The epidural block may make it more difficult to feel when the bladder is full. The midwife will help you remember to urinate at regular intervals. If you are not able to urinate on your own, the midwife can help empty your bladder with a catheter.

The duration of the birth: The epidural does not prolong the duration of the birth significantly. The risk of needing a caesarean section or a suction cup is not increased either.

Itchy skin: The morphine-like substance given with the local anaesthetic can cause

discomfort in the form of itchy skin. However, it is seldom necessary to treat this discomfort, since it is not long-lasting. The skin itching subsides when the epidural block is removed.

Fever: An epidural block can cause fever but it should not affect the baby negatively in any way. It is not known why there is an increasing tendency for fever. The fever may mean that you will be offered paracetamol and penicillin. When the mother has a fever during birth, the staff will always pay extra attention to whether the newborn has an infection.

Soreness around the injection site: You may feel sore for a few days around the injection site on your back. Long-lasting back pains are not triggered by the epidural but they appear frequently in connection with pregnancy and childbirth.

Headache: There is a risk of about 1% of the epidural needle accidentally piercing a small hole in the surrounding tissue of the spinal cord. This may cause headaches during the first few days after giving birth. The headache is affected by your body's position and it worsens when you sit or stand up and is relieved when you lie down. If you experience this kind of headache after giving birth, you must contact the maternity ward. In some cases, the headache will need treatment by an anaesthesiologist. The treatment consists of injecting a small amount of your own blood into the spinal cord, which closes the hole in the spinal cord.

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Pudendal block (Pudendal anaesthesia)

- Can be used against pain at the end of the press period
- Is a local anaesthetic given as an injection in the vagina
- Anesthetize the nerves in the vagina so that your pain is reduced when the baby is squeezed out
- Anesthetizes nerves in the vagina so you do not feel being sewn up after a rupture during birth

Pudendal block is for everyone

The vast majority of women giving birth in the hospital are offered a pudendal anaesthesia.

This is how it is given

A pudendal anaesthesia is usually applied when the pressing period is well underway. You may also be offered a pudendal anaesthesia after giving birth if you need to sew after a cut or a major rupture. The midwife gives you an injection of local anaesthetic, on each side of the vagina, close to the pudendal nerve. The needle is inserted into the vagina through a protective tube. It takes approx. 1 minute to apply a pudendal block. It is different from woman to woman how it feels to have a pudendal block placed. Some do not feel much because the prick is so minimal in comparison to contraction pains. Others may feel a prick and then an uncomfortable tension when the anaesthetic is injected. It takes approx.



5 minutes from the time the local anaesthetic is injected, and until it works. The effect lasts 1-2 hours.

The effects of pudendal block

The pudendal block relieves the pain that occurs when the child unfolds the vagina and the perineum. The pudendal block makes it less painful to push the child out

Side effects

A pudendal block can have such a numbing effect that the urge to press decreases or disappears completely. The blockade can therefore make it harder to push the child out. This can be treated by getting a stimulant drip. For some women, the anaesthesia can extend to the legs, causing sensory disturbances, most often in one leg, for up to 24 hours after giving birth. It disappears by itself and leaves no injuries.

Morphine

- Works on the edge of the contraction pain
- Best used early in the birth process
- Has a soothing and slightly sedative effect
- Given as an injection in the thigh

Many women can get morphine

Most women can use morphine if the baby is well. For the sake of the baby, morphine is not given when the birth is estimated to be within less than 4 hours.

This is how it is done

The midwife gives you the injection of morphine. It takes approx. 15-30 minutes before the morphine works.

This is how morphine works

Morphine works on the edge of the contractions and gives pain relief.

However, the pain does not go away completely. At the same time, morphine has a slight sedative effect, so you become more insensitive to the pain. Therefore, morphine is best used in the early stage of childbirth. You can relax, rest and possibly sleep for a few hours. The effect of morphine lasts for approx. 3 hours.

Side effects

Morphine can cause itching, nausea and vomiting. When you get morphine, your child also gets some of it. If you give birth shortly after receiving morphine, your baby may be lethargic at birth and may have difficulty breathing. Lethargic children do not feel like sucking. Morphine can therefore make it more difficult to start breastfeeding. If the child is born with difficulty breathing, a drug is given to the child, which can diminish the effect of morphine.



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Here you can write your thoughts and questions about pain and pain relief



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