

Pregnancy Pain Management

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Having a baby is the most beautiful and wonderful experience a woman can have. It shouldn't be marred by the pain that pregnancy and childbirth cause, but it's an unfortunate reality.

There are all kinds of ways you can manage pain while pregnant or having a baby – some are medical in nature and others are alternative, non-medicated treatments. You have to choose what's right for you and your baby.

Pregnancy lasts 9 months – and during that time, you'll go through a range of pains such as sharp little stabbing pains that worry you, aching feet and back pains, and more.

Labor pains are even worse. Some people joke about “labor” living up to its name – but there's no reason why you should have to suffer for 10-24 hours or more on what should be one of the happiest days of your life.

Let's investigate some pain management strategies so that you feel more empowered about your choices through pregnancy and then into the labor and delivery process.

Changing Positions and Moving

Babies take up more and more space in your womb as the months go by. At first, you might not be showing yet, but you could be pregnant and feel a few sharp, worrisome pains in your stomach area.

This is usually nothing to worry about, but if you're concerned, or if they're frequent or severe, it's always best to call your doctor. As you progress through your pregnancy, you might experience more pain – especially:

- Pain in your chest

- Pain in your sides
- Pain in your back
- Pain in your legs

One thing that might help is if you move around and change positions. If your chest is hurting, especially at night, then it could be heartburn, which is common during later stages of a pregnancy. Sitting in an elevated position might ease the pain.

Your sides and your stomach are being stretched to the limit at this time. You may want to get a body pillow to help support the weight of your stomach while you sleep, and instead of lying on your back, lay on your side with one leg draped over the lengthy body pillow.

Back pain is typical for women who are pretty far along in their pregnancy. Make sure you get up and move and do stretches to help strengthen your core during this time.

Leg pain can be an issue – and swelling might cause your legs to be painful to the touch. You may not feel much like walking, but sometimes getting the blood flowing in your legs is what will alleviate the pain the most.

During labor, you'll find that changing positions helps tremendously. You'll want to walk the hall before your water breaks, possibly sit on a birthing ball, which is like a yoga ball, and do careful squats to ease the pressure during childbirth.

Many women like to get on their hands and knees to find comfort during this strenuous time. And some maternity wards have something they can put over your bed to let you pull up on the bar and get the pressure off your back.

Deep Breathing

Deep breathing is something that many women use during pregnancy and labor to help with pain. You've probably seen short breaths being used in Lamaze classes at times, but deep breaths also work well.

Pregnancy can be stressful, so whenever you feel any pain, initiate a deep breathing regimen to help in an instant. You'll be offering increased oxygen consumption to both you *and* your baby.

To practice deep breathing, which you'll not only use during the pregnancy but also when you're in labor if you want to, breath in through your nose. Take a deep, abdominal breath and slowly let it out through your mouth.

If you want to, you can add guided imagery, self hypnosis or the emotional freedom technique (EFT) with this to help you get even stronger pain relief when you're practicing deep breathing.

Guided imagery is when you use visual images to redirect your focus off of the pain and into whatever it is you want to concentrate on. That could be you sitting seashore on a beautiful beach at sunset, for example – listening to the waves crash against the rocks.

With self-hypnosis, it's different from going to someone else for a hypnosis session. In this instance, you are completely in control of the hypnosis and there's never any danger of you being "out of it" – you're never unconscious, just refocused in a different, more relaxed state of mind.

EFT is the use of tapping on certain pressure points to replace the memories of your nervous system, which is responsible for the frequency and intensity levels of the pain you experience.

You're retraining your body's reaction to pain using gentle tapping techniques. It's similar to acupuncture, only it's acupressure instead. You can use positive affirmations about your life or your baby to help direct positive energy and healing to the place where you pinpoint the pain to be.

Massage Therapy

Prenatal massage is the perfect pain reliever for early pregnancy all the way through and after the labor and delivery process. Most people – pregnant or not – would enjoy a massage that's being performed to relax the muscles and ease pain and tension.

It's especially soothing to a pregnant woman whose body is rapidly changing and whose stability, mobility and circulation are compromised during the latter months.

You can schedule prenatal massages throughout your pregnancy or have your spouse learn how to apply pressure for you that is specifically intended to relieve pain.

Because you're pregnant, you probably won't be lying down like you would with a standard massage table. Instead, you'll lie on your side, or be seated in a massage chair.

Your massage therapist might have a special table that does allow you to lay down on your stomach because the table has a hole carved out for your tummy and sometimes your breasts, since those become enlarged and tender during pregnancy.

A therapeutic prenatal massage can help with back and leg pain in particular. You can speak up and let them know if there are particular sore spots you'd like addressed. You may even be able to find a midwife who can perform a massage during labor for you.

Water Therapy

You've probably seen videos or read articles about aqua births. This is when a woman decides to give birth in water, usually a tub designed with plenty of space and for utmost comfort.

You can use that approach for childbirth as well – but you can also use it throughout your pregnancy. Water is very healing, and when you've

gained weight and are feeling pain from the body changes, being weightless in water can be an amazing feeling.

As a pregnant woman, you need to get your body's circulation going. You don't want to sit for 9 months of your life – it's not good for you, or the baby. You can use water to move around without feeling pain from the extra weight you're carrying.

If you can, use warm water for your pregnancy-related water therapy. Not too hot – but warm enough to improve circulation, relax your muscles, and decrease the soreness and tenderness that you feel.

You can use water therapy in a swimming pool or in your own personal Jacuzzi. Give yourself a treatment as often as you like. Make sure you also take precautions to make your environment slip-proof so that you don't fall since your center of gravity can be slightly off during a pregnancy.

Epidural

An epidural is for the labor and delivery portion of your pregnancy. This is one of the most popular forms of pain relief for labor because you're not out of it, it's not dangerous to the baby, and you can't feel a thing!

An epidural will block the pain of your labor from the waist down. You won't be able to walk or move your legs after the medicine is administered. Someone will help you hold your legs up during childbirth if you need to move them.

The shot is given between your spine and then administered with an IV over time. If you wait too long, your doctor might say you've passed the point of being able to get an epidural.

You'll be sitting up and leaning forward or lying on your side while the technician administers the medications. The catheter is threaded and within 30 minutes, you won't feel a thing – contractions will come and go and you'll see them on the machine to know they're happening.

Having an epidural doesn't just numb the pain of childbirth – it helps you get a lot of rest, which you'll need right after the baby is born. It also allows you to focus on the enjoyment of bringing a new life into this world!

If you have blood pressure issues, you might need to consult with your doctor about whether or not an epidural is good for you. It can cause your blood pressure to plummet.

Spinal Block

A spinal block isn't used as often as it once was. This is a procedure where a narcotic is administered straight into your spinal fluid for a two-hour pain-relieving option.

The difference between this and an epidural is that an epidural is administered over time with an IV and catheter, whereas a spinal block is a one-time shot. The medications might cross into the baby's blood stream, causing them to have trouble breastfeeding in some instances.

Pain Medications

Some women prefer to receive pain medications known as opiates when they're in childbirth, but most people don't go this route. They're generally given in small doses due to the side effects on both mother and child.

They're supposed to take the edge off of your labor pains, but the side effects can be numerous, including:

- Vomiting
- Dizziness
- Itching
- Drowsiness

That's how it can affect the mother. For the baby, since it crosses into his or her bloodstream, it can cause respiratory problems, trouble breastfeeding, and problems achieving the proper temperature.

Depending on what your doctor approves of, you might be administered a medication such as Demerol, Morphine, or Stadol among others. Demerol is the first choice of opiates. In under five minutes, you see relief.

Pregnancy and delivery should be a beautiful, relaxing time in your life. You want to spend your entire time imagining what it will be like to be a new mom, not mired in the frustration of dealing with pain. Choose an option that works for you and have a backup plan in place for severe episodes during your pregnancy or the delivery.



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