

## Managing Labor Pain

Bronson wants to help you manage your pain during childbirth. Pain in labor cannot be avoided but can be managed in many ways. There are many options available. The nurses and providers will discuss each option with you and your support person (partner, family, friend or doula). They will help you decide what is best for you and your baby. We encourage you to speak-up and ask questions, so your concerns are addressed before and during labor.

### Things you may want to bring from home

- **Aromatherapy** – Different scents, from oils or bath additives, can reduce anxiety and tension. This can help relieve the pain of labor.
- **Light adjustment** – Bright lights can be overstimulating to some people. Adjusting the light down to what feels more comfortable can help with relaxation. You will need to bring a light with you.
- **Music** – Familiar music can change how a person feels pain by engaging a person's emotions and memories.
- **TENS Unit** – These are handheld, portable, electric devices. They are connected to pads that cause tingling or prickling from mild electrical pulses. This distracts your brain from the pain of labor.

### Things a support person can do

- **Acupressure** – is a form of acupuncture with no needles! Instead, you can use fingers, knuckles or tools to put firm pressure on different areas of the body. This helps you to relax and feel less pain.
- **Breathing** - Focusing on breathing is an effective way of lessening stress and anxiety. This can be done by yourself or with the help of a support person. This can reduce pain and muscle tension.
- **Hip Squeezes** – A support person can help put gentle squeezing pressure on your hips. They can move their hands together towards your low back to help with pain and discomfort during labor.



- **Massage** – People in labor can get some distraction and relaxation of the muscles from massage during labor. Some people prefer light touch and others may prefer firm massage. A support person can provide this during labor to help decrease the stress hormones in the body and increase endorphins. You can use a massager, massage ball or tennis ball as well.



- **Meditation and Guided Imagery**– Focus on breathing or images is an effective way of lessening stress and anxiety. This can be done by yourself or with the help of a support person. This can reduce pain and muscle tension.



- **Movement** - People in labor can get some distraction and relaxation of the muscles from moving around during labor.



### Things the hospital can offer

- **Hot or cold application** – Heat can help relax muscles, but both heat and cold can help distract from labor pains.
- **Hydration** – Even if you are not able to have any food by mouth, you can still drink clear liquids (water, teas, sodas, sports drinks) to maintain your hydration and prevent muscle spasms. This can help with managing pain during labor better.
- **Hydrotherapy** – Early in labor soaking in a tub (if available) or getting in the shower can help to relieve some discomfort. This can be offered to women that are term (37-41 weeks gestation) and do not have blood pressure issues.
- **Sterile water papules** – Your team can make a small injection just into the skin of sterile water into your low back to make little bubbles (like a TB test). This can provide fast-acting pain relief that may last a few hours. This can be repeated during labor if needed.
- **Tone of care** – We can work together to help maintain a positive and calm tone in your labor room to maintain a relaxed atmosphere.
- **Variation of position** – Different positions of sitting, laying or standing can help during or between contractions to lessen pain and help with labor progression. We may use tools to support your position including peanuts and bean bags.



### Medicines

- **Epidural**

**How does it work?** Pain medicines are given by a small plastic tube placed in the space around your spinal cord in your lower back. These medicines help to reduce pain signals by acting on nerves near the spine. An epidural is given by an anesthesia provider with a

specialized needle to place the tube. A continuous flow of medicine is given. It may take 15 minutes for pain relief to start. Sometimes, a similar procedure called a spinal may be used to give faster acting pain relief. A spinal is given as a single injection and only lasts 1 to 3 hours. These can provide pain relief throughout the birthing process and through repairs of any cuts or tears in the vagina after delivery.

**What are the side effects?** Common side effects include numb or heavy legs, itching, nausea or a lower blood pressure. The patient may not get out of bed as you may fall with numb or heavy legs. A small number of epidurals are difficult to place or do not provide enough pain relief.

**Are there risks to me or my baby?** Risks can include a headache that can last days or need treatment. Some people may experience back discomfort. There are very rare risks of bleeding, infection or nerve injury. Epidurals may impact labor by slightly slowing labor, increasing the risk for a fever, and increasing the risk for needing assistance with delivery, such a vacuum. An epidural does not increase the risk of needing a c-section. In the event of a c-section, an epidural catheter can often be used to administer stronger medicines to prepare for surgery.

➤ **IV or IM Pain Medicine**

**How does it work?** There are a few different pain medicines used at Bronson. They can be given through an IV (needle to a catheter that is placed into a vein). They can also be injected into a muscle (IM) during labor. Each medicine may last different lengths of time. The goal for using these medicines in labor is to provide quick and lasting pain relief with little side effects for the laboring patient and newborn. These can also be used for repairs of any cuts or tears in the vagina after delivery.

**What are the possible side effects?** Dizziness, nausea and sleepiness

**Are there risks to me or my baby?** Opioids do cross the placenta and can cause side effects to your baby. Your baby may be drowsy and have slow breathing that can affect latch and feeding after birth. Because of the possible effects to baby, IV opioids are not given towards the end (second stage) of labor. Very rarely can cause you to have breathing problems, confusion, forgetfulness, or slowed reflexes.

➤ **Nitrous Oxide**

**How does it work?** Nitrous oxide is an inhaled pain medicine. The patient gives nitrous oxide themselves so they can control the pain relief. Nitrous oxide does not slow down labor progress and can be used throughout the birthing process and through repairs of any cuts or tears in the vagina after delivery.

**What are the possible side effects?:** Dizziness, anxiety, nausea and restlessness are all possible side effects.

**Are there risks to me or my baby?** There are no known risks. Nitrous oxide has been used safely by laboring patient for decades. It is more commonly used in Canada and Europe.

**Resources:**

Bronson Childbirth Education & Parenting Classes -

<https://www.bronsonhealth.com/services/pregnancy-childbirth/education/>

Southwest Michigan Perinatal Improvement Collaborative

<https://www.swmpqic.com> \*Also on Facebook and Instagram\*

DONA International - [Doula Training and Doula Certification – DONA International](#)

Variation in Position – <http://www.spinningbabies.com>

American Academy of Family Physicians: [Managing Pain in Labor - American Family Physician \(aafp.org\)](#)

American Society of Anesthesiologists: <https://www.asahq.org/madeforthismoment/pain-management/types-of-pain/labor/>

American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology: <https://www.acog.org/womens-health/faqs/medications-for-pain-relief-during-labor-and-delivery>

Evidence-Based Birth: <https://evidencebasedbirth.com/category-pain-management-series/>

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services:

<https://www.nichd.nih.gov/health/topics/labor-delivery/topicinfo/pain-relief>