



Mercy Family Birthing Center

DEALING WITH PAIN

Many women who are anticipating labor and birth feel, but perhaps do not acknowledge, that they have fears about the pain of labor. One or more of the following may be a factor involved in a woman's feeling about the prospect of facing pain:

- Fear that she has a "low pain threshold"
- Fear that because she has never experienced severe pain before, she will be unable to handle it well
- Ignorance of what kind of pain will be experienced in childbirth

A woman can help to prepare herself for labor by facing up to her own feelings about pain. During pregnancy she can take certain steps to help to minimize the pain of labor.

- Education about what changes are taking place in the body during pregnancy, and what will be happening during labor & birth, helps to relieve anxiety and helps a woman interpret physical sensations correctly. Many of the unfamiliar sensations felt during labor are not painful, but are likely to be interpreted as pain by the woman who is anxious due to ignorance of how her body is working to birth her baby.
- The principles of good health should be faithfully applied, to be in optimum physical health for the birth.
- Learning control of muscular relaxation must be faithfully practiced, so that she can "let go" muscle tension at will under any conditions of stress.
- Correct breathing for relaxation and helpful breathing techniques for comfort in labor should be learned in advance.
- Making concrete birth plans with her birth team ahead of time will allay many fears related to loss of control over the birth experience.

Labor pain, like all other pain, is a function of the whole person. The experience of pain in labor is profoundly influenced by the values of the society in which the woman grew up. Each person will react to pain differently. It has been found that the degree of pain tolerated bears a direct relation to the rate of increase in pain, rather than to the level of pain reached. This may have particular relevance to a very rapid labor, when the pace is more than a woman can cope with. It has also been found that the context within which pain occurs is important. As an experiment, electric shocks were given to test people first when they were feeling relaxed and cheerful, and then when they had been made anxious. The electric shocks were felt as much less painful when the subjects were feeling cheerful.

Coping with pain in labor can be helped immensely by using simple, non-interventive tools:

- Breathe with the contraction as you swim with a wave. Pace your breathing to the strength & length of the contractions.
- Concentrate. Keep a positive mental picture of what is happening in your body.

- Relax! Muscular relaxation is a mechanical way to relieve pain. Massage of shoulders, back, legs & abdomen help with relaxation.
- Stay in present time; deal with one “thirty second hard part” (contraction) at a time.
- Good labor support is a verbal pain relief.
- Empty the bladder every hour.
- Change positions to promote progress and comfort.
- Maintain eye contact with coach especially during difficult contractions.
- Take a shower, or – before the water breaks- a warm bath.
- Apply heating pad to hips, thighs, abdomen.
- For back pain: counter pressure
change position
change temperature (heat/ice)
- AVOID: Dehydration – sip water, tea, juice
Isolation – labor coach close by
Exhaustion – relax, save energy
Cold – comfy clothes, warm socks
Stress – tranquil environment
- Remind yourself: Labor is a do-able experience and a wonderfully rewarding challenge!
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