



Nitrous Oxide

for pain relief during labor

WHAT IS NITROUS OXIDE?

Most people know of nitrous oxide as “laughing gas”, which is used in many dental offices to help with pain during dental procedures. When nitrous oxide is used for labor pain, it is a mixture of 50% nitrous gas and 50% oxygen. This gas is inhaled through a mask that is provided by our facility. Nitrous oxide has been a common practice to help cope with labor pain in Europe, Canada, and Australia for many years.

HOW DOES NITROUS OXIDE WORK TO RELIEVE PAIN DURING LABOR?

You will hold the mask or mouth piece with a firm seal against your face and breathe in to release the flow of nitrous oxide. You will be in control of the amount nitrous that you receive by the depth and frequency of the breaths you take. It is important to initiate the breath about 30 seconds before the contraction starts. This allows the gas to take effect and give the most relief at the peak of your contraction. You are then able to put the mask down between contractions and use it as needed throughout labor.

HOW DOES NITROUS OXIDE HELP WITH LABOR PAIN?

Each patient has a different experience when using nitrous oxide. Most women voice that the nitrous oxide helps “take the edge off” of the contractions and allows them to cope with labor better. Some report more pain relief. Nitrous oxide helps in lowering anxiety, which helps you feel less tense during contractions. A decrease in anxiety can also help you cope with pain better. Some women do not find nitrous oxide helpful or do not like the way it makes them feel. The use of nitrous oxide can be stopped at any time, and alternative pain management methods can be used.

HOW WILL I FEEL WHEN USING NITROUS OXIDE?

Some women report feeling drowsy, lightheaded, nauseous, or a little silly while using nitrous oxide. Due to some of these possible side effects, a member of our team or a family member should always be in the room while using nitrous oxide. These side effects should go away quickly when you stop breathing the nitrous oxide.

ARE THERE ANY SEVERE SIDE EFFECTS OF NITROUS OXIDE USE?

You could pass out for a short time if you were to breathe too much gas. This is why we strictly enforce that you should be the only person holding the mask. The nitrous oxide gas is only released when you take a deep breath. If you were to take in

too much gas your hand would slip away from the mask, and you will no longer breathe in the gas if you start to get sleepy. Nitrous oxide has no known effect on the progress of labor.

CAN I BE OUT OF BED WHEN USING NITROUS OXIDE?

Yes, you may be out of bed as long as you have assistance to another stationary position such as the rocking chair or birthing ball.

DOES THE NITROUS OXIDE AFFECT MY BABY?

As soon as you pull the mask away, the nitrous effect is gone within a few breaths. However, there could be theoretical risks to nitrous oxide as well as most other pain relieving medication used during pregnancy and delivery. While most labor studies have not identified adverse outcomes in the babies of mothers who use nitrous during labor, some animal studies have shown effects on baby animals and it is not known, if in the future, there may be proven some negative effects on humans.

WHO ADMINISTERS THE NITROUS OXIDE?

The nitrous oxide is self-administered by the laboring woman. You will breathe it in as you feel necessary.

CAN I USE NITROUS OXIDE AND HAVE INTRAVENOUS (IV) OPIOID MEDICATIONS AT THE SAME TIME?

No, this would require a different level of monitoring for both you and your baby.

MUST I CHOOSE BETWEEN EITHER USING NITROUS OXIDE OR HAVING AN EPIDURAL?

You may choose to use nitrous oxide prior to epidural or other IV pain medications. They cannot be used simultaneously. It is perfectly fine to use the nitrous oxide first, and then move on to a different type of pain management.

ARE THERE ANY REASONS THAT I COULD NOT USE NITROUS OXIDE?

Yes, you cannot use nitrous oxide if you:

- Cannot hold your own facemask
- Have a known vitamin B12 deficiency
- Have received a narcotic medication within the past 2 hours
- Have other medical conditions identified by your doctor that place you at risk