



Non-Pharmacological Pain Relief

Labour Support & Doulas

Evidence shows that good continuous labour support reduces the need for pharmacological pain relief, and reduces the rate of labour interventions, assisted vaginal delivery and Caesarian section. Labour support can be provided by your partner, a friend/relative, your midwife (in a certain capacity), or a doula. When deciding who you would like present with you during labour and birth, you should choose a person/people who are supportive of your birth plan/wishes, will provide positive encouragement, and keep you calm and relaxed in your labour. Some people will choose to hire a doula if they feel their partner may not be able to support them the way they anticipate needing support, or if they feel they need extra support not only for themselves, but their partner as well.

A doula is a trained support person who provides continuous one-on-one emotional, physical, and informative support. Doulas do *not* provide any medical care – this responsibility lies with your midwife. Doulas can provide information you need to understand and make the best decision for you and your baby, but they cannot make medical decisions or speak for you. Most doulas provide intrapartum care – that is during labour, although some doulas can also provide prenatal and/or postpartum support as well. Doula's are not covered by OHIP or by most supplementary health coverage plans, and often are an out of pocket expense. Their fees can range from 500\$-1500\$ depending on their experience or the support you require. Many doulas work on a sliding-scale or geared-to-income fee approach and can even offer payment plans. Sometimes, doula students are available for a reduced or nominal fee as part of their training requirements. A doula should meet with you at least once at no charge prenatally to meet you and review your birthing plan.

Massage/Pressure

You don't need to be professionally trained to provide massage in labour – often loving, nurturing strokes on the arms, back, and legs is all that is required to calm and soothe. Some people like pressure applied to their hips or on their low back. Often midwives are busy providing safe medical care for you and your baby and can only offer massage intermittently between tasks, so it is best to plan for your partner or support person to fill this role.

Heat

A heating pack such as a heating pad or bean bag on the low back or belly can be a great way to relax and soothe sore muscles in labour. Heat packs are great for afterbirth pains when the uterus is working hard to contract down to its non-pregnant size.

Hydrotherapy/Water

The term 'hydrotherapy' is sometimes used to describe the use of water immersion during labour but can also be applied when using water in any capacity to provide comfort. Hydrotherapy can involve using the shower in labour or being immersed in a tub of water. Immersion in water increases buoyancy and reduces anxiety in labour. There are also no side effects for mother or baby. Studies have shown that hydrotherapy lowers the need for pharmacological pain medication and it makes people feel more satisfied with their pain relief. Hydrotherapy's effectiveness on pain is said to be more effective than narcotic medications.

Currently in Cambridge Memorial Hospital, all labour rooms have showers. There is a tub which is available for use on a first come first served basis. This tub may be used for pain relief in labour, however, cannot be used for waterbirth. If you are interested in waterbirth, your midwife can offer this in the setting of a home birth.

TENS

TENS or transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation can be provided by using a handheld portable device that is connected to electrodes which are placed on the skin – normally over the low back on either side of the spine. The device sends electrical pulses via the electrodes through the skin producing a buzzing, tingling, or prickling sensation where the pads are placed. You can adjust the intensity of the pulses as needed during contractions. TENS can be used with other non-drug and drug methods of pain relief – except for hydrotherapy for obvious safety reasons. Researchers think that TENS might work by changing how a person perceives their pain. There are no side effects to TENS. TENS devices can be purchased for personal use and cost around 30-100\$ depending on the unit. Your midwife may also have one as part of her equipment available for use.

Hypnobirthing or Calm Birthing

The ability to relax is important in labour, as the more relaxed and calm you are, the less pain you perceive. When you are tense and anxious – your perception of pain increases. You might consider attending a hypnobirthing class or even working with a counsellor prenatally. You can learn coping techniques to calm and relax yourself. Not only are these practical skills useful for labour and birth, but also applicable in all aspects of life.

Homeopathy / Naturopathy

Homeopathic remedies can be used for pain management in labour. You can visit a naturopath or homeopathic doctor prenatally to provide some remedies which can be used in labour.

Aromatherapy

Aromatherapy is a traditional and historical practice of using essential oils from plants in order to enhance well-being. Oils may be massaged into the skin, given in a warm bath, or diffused into the air using a diffuser. The purpose of using aromatherapy during labor is to manage anxiety and thus decrease the intensity of pain perceived as intensity of the pain we perceive is linked to increased levels of anxiety. Unless you have any sensitivities to particular scents of essential oils being used in labour, there are no negative side effects to aromatherapy in labour.

It may be beneficial to visit an aromatherapist prenatally to see which essential oils would be best suited for your needs.

Position

Being comfortable in your labour is going to make a big difference in your pain tolerance. Mobility is important in labour as you can work with your body and help baby to get into the best position possible for birth. The worst positions you can be in for labour is lying flat on your back in bed or semi-reclining (think C shape). Upright positions where you can lean forward during contractions are the most ideal.

Sterile water injections

A small amount of sterile water is injected at the base of your back just under the skin. It has been shown to reduce backache due to back labour and can often provide you with enough relief to relax your muscles in order for baby to turn into a better position for delivery. Relief is almost immediate for up to 90% of people and can last up to two hours. The drawback of sterile water injections is that they have sharp wasp-like sting which lasts 30-60 seconds, however many people report it's worth the pain and has prevented them from requesting other forms of pain relief which weren't part of their birth plan.