THE ANESTHESIA EXPERIENCE DURING LABOR & DELIVERY
A PATIENT GUIDE FOR OBSTETRICAL ANESTHESIA

Our Unmatched Anesthesia Experience. Your OR’s Advantage.
I'm pregnant, what should I know about pain medication?

Women's birthing experiences are unique and their levels of pain tolerance differ. For some pregnant women, focused breathing is all they need to get through labor and childbirth; while for others, numbing of the pain is desired. There are a number of different medications a woman can take during labor and childbirth. It is important for you to become educated on what pain relief options are available. Please discuss the options with your Obstetrical Care Team well before your “birth day” so that when you are in labor you fully understand your choices.

What pain relief medications are available to decrease pain during contractions?

There are a few options for pain relief medications during labor and childbirth:

- Local anesthesia may be used by your doctor during delivery to numb a painful area or after delivery, if stitches are necessary. It is important to note, local anesthetic medications do not reduce discomfort during labor.

- Regional anesthesia may also be called an epidural, spinal anesthesia or a combined spinal-epidural. It is administered by a member of the anesthesia care team during labor to reduce discomfort. In both epidural and spinal anesthesia, medication is placed near the nerves in your lower back to “block” pain in a wide region of your body while you remain conscious. Regional anesthesia greatly reduces pain throughout the birthing process. It can also be used if a birth by Caesarean section becomes necessary.

- Pain-relieving medications can be injected into a vein or a muscle to dull labor discomfort. These medications do not completely cease the pain, but they do lessen it. As these pain-relieving medications affect your entire body and may cause drowsiness in you and your baby, these drugs are mainly used during early labor to help you rest and conserve your energy.
Will the anesthesia affect my baby?
No. Considerable research has shown that regional anesthesia, both epidural and spinal, is safe for you and your baby.

How long does it take for anesthesia to work and how long will it last?
An epidural starts working 10 to 20 minutes after the medication has been injected. Pain relief from epidural anesthesia lasts as long as you need it, since medication can always be given through the catheter.

Spinal anesthesia starts working immediately after the medication has been injected. Pain relief lasts about two and a half hours. If your labor is expected to last beyond this time, an epidural catheter may be inserted to deliver medications to continue your pain relief as long as needed.

Will I feel any discomfort after receiving the anesthesia?
Although you will feel significant pain relief after receiving anesthesia, you may still feel pressure from your contractions. In addition, you may feel pressure when your obstetric care provider examines you.
Will regional anesthesia slow my labor?
No. In some women, labor and contractions may slow after regional anesthesia for a short period of time but on average labor duration is unaffected. Most women find that regional anesthesia helps them to relax and actually improves their contraction pattern while allowing them to rest.

If I have regional anesthesia, will I be able to push?
Regional anesthesia allows you to rest comfortably while your cervix dilates. In most cases, it should not affect your ability to push; instead, it will make pushing more comfortable for you.

Are there any side effects to regional anesthesia?
Your anesthesiologist takes special precautions to prevent complications. Although complications are rare, some side effects may include:

- **Decreased blood pressure**
  You will receive intravenous fluids and your blood pressure will be carefully monitored; drops in blood pressure are routine and easily treated with medication.

- **Mild itching during labor**
  If itching becomes bothersome, advise your anesthesiologist and he or she can treat it.

- **Headache**
  Headaches are common after childbirth and are rarely caused by regional anesthesia. If a headache persists, tell your health care provider.

- **Local anesthetic reaction**
  While local anesthetic reactions are rare, be sure to tell your anesthesia care team member if you become dizzy or develop ringing in your ears so that he or she can quickly treat the problem.

What’s right for you?
The birthing process is unique to every woman. Some women need little or no pain relief, while others find that the pain relief they receive gives them better control over labor and delivery. The bottom line is that you have to decide what works best for you and your body. Don’t be afraid to ask for pain relief if you need it. Be sure to speak with your obstetrical team or anesthesia care team about your options.

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About North American Partners in Anesthesia

Founded in 1986, North American Partners in Anesthesia (NAPA) is the leading single specialty anesthesia management company in the United States. NAPA is comprised of the most respected clinical staff, providing thousands of patients with superior and attentive care. The company is known for partnering with hospitals and other health care facilities across the nation to provide anesthesia services and perioperative leadership that maximize operating room performance, enhance revenue, and demonstrate consistent patient and surgeon satisfaction ratings.

Contact NAPA
Email CustomerService@NAPAanesthesia.com
Call 1.888.240.1793
Fax 516.945.3137

Mailing Address:
North American Partners in Anesthesia
68 South Service Road, Suite 350
Melville, NY 11747

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