

Pain Management Through Labor and Delivery

Lindsay and Brian Richards are expecting their first child.

“Our plan is to deliver naturally and un-medicated, and we would prefer to have a water birth.”

Olga and Hayelom Tadesse are also expecting their first child. But they're taking a more conventional approach.

“I’m okay with epidural and any other I/V that’s needed or any other medication.”

Whatever path you choose, it’s important to educate yourself about your options for pain management during labor and delivery.

For Olga and Hayelom, that means attending a childbirth class taught by their care providers.

“I would say in the third trimester is a good time to start thinking about whether you think you want an epidural. Whether you think you want pain medicine.”

More than half of women who have a vaginal delivery will get epidural anesthesia.

“An epidural goes in your back and makes you completely comfortable from the waist down. Epidurals are great throughout labor. You don’t want to get it too early. You want to get it during good strong active labor.”

Narcotic pain medication is another option.

“It does not take the pain away, but it will take the edge off. It goes in your I/V. It will make the baby sleepy because it does cross the placenta.”

Nitrous oxide, also known as laughing gas, is a choice available in some states.

“Typically, those are hospitals or birth centers that are staffed with nurse midwives, and they’ve used it for many, many years in the UK, and care providers that use it, use it with a lot of success.”

“I’m concerned, as well as my husband, in terms of what happens when those medications are given to me and will it affect the baby while in labor.”

“That’s the number one thing that I hear. That it’s going to hurt the baby, or it’s going to alter her labor in some way. There are side effects of any intervention, so they are legitimate concerns; however, most pain medicine is fairly safe, nowadays.”

Still, some women like Lindsay choose to forgo pain medication.

“What I’d like to do with you today is cover some natural pain management techniques.”

She and Brian have hired a doula, a specially trained labor support person, to teach them about pain management.

“Most of my clientele are going for an un-medicated birth and want someone with that experience and knowledge base on how to help them.”

“I’m going to show you Brian how to touch during labor so that hopefully when we’re at birth day you guys will be working really well as a team.”

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Learning touch techniques along with a variety of body positions is key for natural childbirth.

“We cope better when we’re moving. So, having a woman move in a lot of different positions, squatting, or sitting on a birth ball, or putting her in the shower, standing, doing a slow dance move with her partner, all of those help you cope with the intensity of labor.”

“She’s giving us a lot of tools to manage pain and also manage the mobility that she’s going to need to deliver the way we’d like to.”

Whether you go with unmedicated or medicated childbirth, having emotional support can provide some relief during labor and delivery.

“Just having someone that can rub your back, having someone with you that says, “This is okay. This is normal.”

Relaxation with aromatherapy or music may also help. Check with your hospital to see if scents are allowed – some hospitals restrict them because of allergies and or sensitivities.

“When you can just let your body relax, and just let the labor happen, you’ll get through the pain much, much easier.”

Even with the best planning, the unexpected can happen during labor so women should be prepared to be flexible.

“We have a plan A, plan B, plan C. So, we understand there might come a time where we might have to have some type of intervention.”

“I really would discourage a woman from deciding on one perfect route and then feeling that any deviation from that plan that’s written long before she knows what she’s going to be dealing with would be a failure.”

Labor is a beautiful journey with or without medication. Whatever path you take, the ultimate goal is a safe delivery for both mom and baby.