

Nitrous Oxide for Labor and Delivery

As your due date gets closer, you and your healthcare provider will talk about your choices for managing pain during labor and delivery. One option may be Nitrous Oxide.

This inhaled gas can ease anxiety and help you feel more relaxed during labor. Many people describe it as “taking the edge off” the pain. It’s a safe option for both you and your baby.

Nitrous oxide is also known as laughing gas. It’s a mix of nitrogen and oxygen. To use it, you inhale the gas through a mask.

Nitrous oxide works quickly—within 30 seconds—and wears off in a few minutes. So it’s best to use it right before a contraction. Nitrous oxide does not numb a part of your body, like an epidural. So you can still move around during labor.

You can also control how often you use the gas and when you want to stop using it.

Nitrous oxide can cause some side effects. It may make you feel dizzy, drowsy, or sick to your stomach. But these effects often go away quickly.

Nitrous oxide is a safe option for many people. But you may not be able to use it if you: Can’t hold the mask yourself; Have a vitamin B12 deficiency; Had a recent surgery on your inner ear or retina; Or have certain health problems, such as pulmonary hypertension or a sinus infection.

Nitrous oxide is not available at all birth centers or hospitals. So talk with your healthcare provider to see if it may be an option for you.