

NITROUS OXIDE

for Childbirth

MILE BLUFF'S OBSTETRICS DEPARTMENT OFFERS NITROUS OXIDE FOR LABORING MOTHERS. THIS NON-INVASIVE, SELF-ADMINISTERED PAIN MANAGEMENT ALTERNATIVE IS A SAFE APPROACH TO HELP RELIEVE LABOR SYMPTOMS.

WHAT IS NITROUS OXIDE?

Nitrous Oxide (also called "Laughing Gas), is a colorless, odorless, tasteless gas, which is used to decrease pain during contractions. Nitrous oxide that is used for labor pain is a mixture of 50% nitrous gas and 50% oxygen that is inhaled through a mask.

Nitrous oxide is not a new method of pain control during childbirth. It was first used during labor in the 1930s and is currently widely used in Europe.



HOW DOES IT WORK?

You hold your own mask and begin to inhale the gas mixture about 30-45 seconds before a contraction begins. Starting to inhale before the contraction begins helps the gas to reach its peak effect at about the same time as the contraction reaches its peak. This provides the greatest relief.

WILL MY PROVIDER OR A NURSE ANESTHETIST BE ADMINISTERING NITROUS?

No, nitrous is self-administered by the laboring woman, breathing it in as you feel the need. Once you decide you want to use it, your provider will order it and a registered nurse will come to your room, set it up, and review how to use it.

HOW WILL I FEEL WHEN USING NITROUS OXIDE?

You may feel relaxed, sleepy or lightheaded. You control how much nitrous oxide you get by holding the mask on your face. If you get very relaxed, your hand will slip away from the mask and you will no longer breathe in the gas. This protects you from passing out or getting too much.

For the safety of you and your baby, NEVER prop the mask against your face or have anyone else hold the mask.

DOES IT HAVE ANY SIDE EFFECTS?

Some women have reported nausea after prolonged use. There are medications to help ease the nausea if that happens. Nitrous oxide can also cause some unsteadiness when walking, which is why there should always be a staff person in the room when you would like to get out of a chair or bed, in case you need assistance.

CAN I STILL BE OUT OF BED AND USE NITROUS?

Yes. You may be out of bed and use the nitrous. As long as you are steady on your feet, you may be up and about in your room.

CAN I USE NITROUS AND HAVE IV NARCOTICS AT THE SAME TIME?

No. Nitrous oxide cannot be used with IV narcotics. The combination of narcotics and nitrous can slow your breathing. If you had an IV pain medication prior you will need to wait 2 hours before you can use nitrous.

DO I HAVE TO CHOOSE BETWEEN EITHER USING NITROUS OXIDE OR HAVING AN EPIDURAL?

No. Some women may use nitrous prior to having an epidural placed. Though they would not be used together (the epidural and nitrous), it is perfectly fine to use nitrous first, and then move to a different type of pain relief if you find you need something else.

ARE THERE ANY REASONS I COULD NOT USE IT?

Yes, you cannot use it if you

- cannot hold your own face mask
- have received a dose of narcotics in the past 2 hours
- have pernicious anemia or B12 deficiency for which you take B12 supplements.

IS THERE ANY EXTRA BABY MONITORING REQUIRED?

No. Intermittent fetal monitoring can still be used if you do not have reasons to be monitored continuously.

ARE THERE ANY EFFECTS ON THE BABY?

No, there are no known effects on the baby. Nitrous is the only pain relief method used for labor that is cleared from the body through the lungs, so as soon as you stop breathing the gas, the nitrous effect is gone within a breath or two.

HOW CAN I LEARN MORE?

For more information about using Nitrous Oxide during labor, talk to your maternity care provider. You can also contact Mile Bluff's Obstetrics Department by calling 608-847-1012 or the Childbirth Education Department at 608-847-1013.

