

Nitrous Oxide

 Elliot Health System

What is Nitrous Oxide?

Nitrous oxide used for labor pain is a mixture of 50% nitrous gas and 50% oxygen. It is inhaled through a mask or mouthpiece that a woman in labor holds. She breathes it in when she needs it. There is a version of nitrous oxide used in dentists' offices. Most people know it as "laughing gas." The blend of gas used for laboring women is different than the dentist's office. So it is not anesthesia. The women may still feel labor pain, but is not bothered as much by the pain. Nitrous oxide is used widely in Europe and Canada.

How does Nitrous Oxide work?

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

Does Nitrous Oxide have side effects?

Some women have nausea after prolonged use. If you have this, there is

medication to help ease this nausea. Nitrous oxide can also cause you to feel unsteady when you get out of bed. That is why we ask that you talk to your nurse if you want to get out of your chair or bed. She will help you. Your family member may also be on the other side of you when you stand, too. This will help you feel steady.

Can I still be out of bed or chair when I use Nitrous Oxide?

Yes, you can. As long as you are steady on your feet, you may be up and about in your room.

Is there any extra monitoring needed?

No, there is no extra fetal monitoring needed while Nitrous Oxide is in use.

Do I need an IV?

No.

Can I use Nitrous Oxide and have IV narcotic at the same time?

No, the combination of narcotics and nitrous oxide can slow your breathing. They would not be used together.

Are there reasons I cannot use Nitrous Oxide?

- ☞ If you cannot hold your own mouthpiece or mask
- ☞ You have had a narcotic in the past two hours
- ☞ You have pernicious anemia or a B12 deficiency for which you take B12 supplements

Are there any effects on my baby?

No, there are no known effects on the baby. Nitrous Oxide is the only pain relief method used for that that is cleared from the body through your lungs. So as soon as you pull the mask away, the Nitrous effect is gone in a second or two.

Do I have to choose between either Nitrous Oxide or having an Epidural?

No, some women use Nitrous Oxide prior to having an Epidural. These two are not used together at the same time, though. It is fine to use Nitrous Oxide first, and then move to an Epidural when you need to change pain relief options.