

COMFORT MEASURES *in* LABOR

Comfort measures that provide natural pain relief can be very effective during labor and childbirth. Birthing techniques such as hydrotherapy, hypnobirthing, patterned breathing, relaxation, massage and visualization can increase the production of endogenous endorphins (“feel good” hormones) that bind to receptors in the brain for pain relief. These and other methods can reduce the need for narcotic pain meds or epidurals by naturally preventing the painful signals of labor contractions from reaching the brain.

We have several options available to you while you labor at our hospital.

Birthing Ball

The ball allows the woman to shift her weight, rock her pelvis and find comfortable positions during labor. These motions encourage the baby’s head to move into the proper position in the mother’s pelvis. Your nurses can show you some of these techniques.

The ball also allows gravity to work and encourages the baby to drop down further into the mother’s pelvis. The hands and knees position may also be used on the ball, which decreases the pressure and stress on the mother’s hands and wrists.

Hydrotherapy

Hydrotherapy during labor (techniques using water) can be emotionally soothing and can also help with pain relief. Many of the private bathrooms in our labor suites include a Jacuzzi tub. The woman may recline in the Jacuzzi or use the hand-held shower massage during active labor. Many women are comforted by the combination of warmth, water pressure and the sound of the water. Advocates of hydrotherapy even suggest that immersion in water may accelerate labor, decrease blood pressure and increase the laboring woman’s feeling of control over her birth.

Movement and Position Changes

We encourage you to be active while you are in labor. You may experience less pain in some positions than in others during labor. Laboring women tend to find upright positions most comfortable such as sitting, standing and walking. Many choose a lying down position as labor advances. Moving around during labor is usually more comfortable than staying still and can help the labor progress through gravity and pelvis movement. It may also relieve pain by shifting pressure and allowing the baby to move.

Heat and Cold

Heat can be effective when applied with hot, moist towels or warm blankets. Cold may be applied using an ice bag or washcloths soaked in ice water. Hot compresses on the lower abdomen, groin or perineum, a warm blanket over the entire body and ice packs to the lower back or perineum can help alleviate labor pain. Using heat or cold on separate parts of the body at the same time can provide particularly effective pain relief. For example, apply a cool cloth to the forehead with warmth on the lower back. For maximum effect, change the heat and cold locations frequently, about every twenty minutes.

(continued on back)