

Swedish Perinatal Services

Nitrous Oxide Patient Education

What is Nitrous?

Nitrous Oxide is a clear gas with no smell that is used for labor pain. It is a mix of 50% nitrous gas and 50% oxygen. You breathe it through a mask that you hold to your face. It is like “laughing gas” in a dentist office, but it is a different mix and doesn’t make you laugh. It will not take away all the pain, but it will make it less intense.

How does it work?

When you hold the mask up to your face, you will press it around your nose and mouth and breathe in the gas. It takes about 30-60 seconds to start working, so you should start breathing it in just before a contraction begins to get the best relief.

Does it have any side effects?

Some people report nausea (feeling sick to your stomach) after using nitrous for a long time. If this happens, but it is still helping with your labor pain, we could give you a medication to help with the nausea. It can also make you feel unsteady when standing or walking. You should always have a support person or staff member with you in the room when getting up. Rarely, it can cause vomiting, tiredness and anxiety.

Can I still be out of bed and use nitrous?

Yes, you can get out of bed and move around while using Nitrous, but you may need some help. Always have someone with you while getting up. The Nitrous machine is attached to the wall, so the machine can’t go everywhere in the room with you.

Do I need an IV?

You do not need an IV just because you’re using Nitrous. We recommend having an IV to be in place for emergencies, but it doesn’t need to be hooked up to fluids. You may need an IV for other reasons.

Can I use nitrous with other pain relief options?

You can’t use Nitrous with IV narcotics since the combination can slow down your breathing. You can start using Nitrous about an hour after your last dose of IV narcotics, or can use IV narcotics after you stop using Nitrous.

You can use Nitrous before getting an epidural, right up to the point of getting it. If you want to use nitrous while the epidural is being placed, we will talk with the anesthesiologist.

Are there any reasons I could not use Nitrous?

Yes, there are a few situations:

- If you can’t hold the mask to your own face.
- If you have B12 deficiency, which is common in people who eat a Vegan diet, have had gastric bypass or GI diseases
- If you have recently used drugs or alcohol
- Other medical conditions will be checked by your nurse

Are there any effects on the baby?

There are no known effects on the baby while using Nitrous during labor. The effects of Nitrous in the 1st and 2nd trimester are unknown. Nitrous is cleared from the body through the lungs, so as soon as you pull the mask away the effect goes away quickly.

What should my support people know?

Nitrous should only be used by the laboring person when they can hold the mask to their own face. If a support person helps to hold the mask to your face, it could slow down your breathing, and we will need to remove the Nitrous machine from your room. Only the laboring person can inhale the gas. If anyone else uses the mask, the Nitrous machine will be removed from the room and the person may be asked to leave.

What do I need to agree to for use?

- I will need to have a support person or staff member with me when getting up, or I will call for help.
- I will need to hold the mask, and no one can help me.
- I will not use the machine continuously, only when needed.
- I will not share the machine with anyone else; it is for me to use only.
- I understand that there are possible side effects, that will go away quickly when I stop using it.