

Nitrous Oxide (Laughing Gas) for Labor

What is nitrous oxide?

Nitrous oxide is a gas with no color, smell, or taste. It lessens pain. You can use it to lessen your pain during labor. It's considered safe for you and your baby.

How does nitrous oxide work?

- You will breathe in the gas through a mask.
- You give the gas to yourself by holding the mask to your face. Before you start, a nurse will set it up and teach you how to use it.
- Before a contraction begins, you put the mask on your face and breathe in the gas for about 45 seconds. This timing helps the gas affect your body when the contraction is most painful.

Questions you may have about nitrous oxide

Will it affect the baby?

No, we do not know of any effects on the baby. Your lungs will get rid of the gas just a few breaths after you take the mask away.

Are there side effects?

You might feel:

- Nausea (feeling like you are going to vomit)
 - If this happens, we will give you medication to decrease your nausea.
- Unsteadiness (feeling like you might fall over)
 - A family member or staff person should help you when you get out of a chair or bed.



Can I use nitrous oxide while I'm not in the bed?

Yes. You may use nitrous oxide out of the bed as long as you are steady on your feet.

Can I use nitrous oxide with other medications?

- ✗ You cannot use it with intravenous narcotics (pain medications that go directly into your blood through a vein).
- ☑ You can use it **before** an epidural. Although you can't use nitrous oxide and an epidural at the same time, you can use the nitrous oxide first and then move on to the epidural.

Does the staff check the baby's heartbeat more frequently if I take nitrous oxide?

No. We will check your baby's heartbeat and your vital signs every once in a while as we usually do, unless your baby requires extra monitoring for another reason.

You cannot use nitrous oxide if—

- You cannot hold your own facemask.
- You have received a narcotic medication (pain medication) in the past hour.
- You have a Vitamin B12 deficiency (you don't have enough Vitamin B12 in your blood) and take B12 supplements.
- Your provider says you cannot take it due to another medical condition that you may have.

Need more information?

Watch this video on a computer about nitrous oxide gas for labor. The video is in English and has closed captions.

“Gas Is No Laugh at Vanderbilt”: <https://youtu.be/lPyuerAoKg8>



Did you know?

Only a few maternity care units in the country offer nitrous oxide for pain relief during labor. We are so pleased to make this option available to you!

Questions? Call Us!

Labor and Delivery: 505-272-2603
