

Nitrous Oxide During Labor

What is nitrous oxide?

Commonly called “laughing gas,” it is a mix of 50% oxygen and 50% nitrous oxide gases. It is inhaled through a mask that you hold and can be used to lessen pain throughout labor, delivery, and recovery. Nitrous oxide is used to relieve pain, decrease anxiety, induce euphoria, and/or reduce the awareness of pain.

Why use nitrous oxide?

Nitrous oxide gas has a quick onset and does not buildup in you or your baby.

- The effects disappear within seconds.
- Because the gas leaves your body quickly you can more easily transition to other forms of pain medication, including IV narcotics or an epidural.
- It does not affect your baby’s alertness.
- It does not affect contractions or slow down labor.
- It allows you to maintain your mobility while laboring.
- It does not affect breastfeeding.
- It is self-administered, so you can decide how much to use and when to stop using it.

How to use nitrous oxide

- Nitrous oxide is self-administered using a face mask.
- Nitrous oxide is released only when you breathe in.
- It can take up to 50 seconds for the gas to work, so inhalation should begin 30 seconds prior to a contraction.

Reasons a person cannot use nitrous oxide

- You are unable to hold your own face mask.
- Recent ear, eye, or brain injury/surgery.
- Vitamin B12 deficiency.
- Serious lung problems (excluding asthma).



Possible side effects of nitrous oxide

- Nausea, vomiting, dizziness, sedation, dysphoria (uneasiness).

Safety rules for nitrous oxide use

- Nitrous oxide is for patient use only and the patient must hold her own mask.
- For the safety of you and your baby, no exceptions are tolerated.
- If someone other than you is found using the nitrous oxide, or holding the mask in place for you, it will result in termination of nitrous use for your entire hospital stay.