5 Tips That Can Help You Prepare For Labor

1. **Take a childbirth preparation class.** It’s a great way to learn about different coping options.

2. **Create a birth plan.** This can help you outline your preferences once you’ve decided on the coping strategies you’d like to try.

3. **Be open to change.** As your labor progresses, your wishes and needs may change. Your care team will explain why a change will be helpful so you can make the right decision and adjust your plan as needed.

4. **Communicate with your care team.** Let your care team know your preferences, and they will make sure you’re involved in every step of your labor and delivery.

5. **Remember you’re in good hands.** Our number one priority is your health and the health of your baby.

This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other health care professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor. Kaiser Permanente does not endorse the medications or products mentioned. Any trade names listed are for easy identification only.

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Coping With Pain During Labor and Delivery

Pain is a normal part of giving birth. Each woman copes with labor pain in her own way. Before you go into labor, it’s a good idea to explore both natural and medical coping methods. It is possible to reduce pain, but no method is guaranteed to take it away totally.

Talk to your clinician about the different coping strategies you want to try.

Natural Coping Methods

There are lots of ways to help with pain during labor that you can do without using medication. Some techniques you do yourself, while others involve a support person. Think about who you want to be with you during labor, and talk to them about how they can help you manage pain. Practicing your favorite methods in a class or at home can make you feel more confident before you give birth. Coping methods include:

- **Massage**
  Your support person can massage your shoulders, lower back, hands, or feet.

- **Focused Breathing**
  Helps calm you and focuses your mind. You can learn different breathing methods from childbirth preparation classes, yoga, and meditation.

- **Making a Change**
  Shifting positions, even walking if you are able, may help relieve pressure in your back and the rest of your body. Changing the lighting and temperature in the room may also help.

- **Guided Imagery**
  Imagine your contractions as waves rolling over your body. Picturing a favorite peaceful place like a meadow or a sparkling lake can help calm your mind.

- **Heat and Cold Therapy**
  Try applying a heating pad to your lower back or lower abdomen. Use a cold cloth on your neck and face or suck on ice chips or a cold washcloth. Showering may help too.

Medical Coping Methods

Medical techniques can also help you cope with pain during labor. Each method has pros and cons, so discuss them with your clinician prior to labor.

- **TENS (Transcutaneous Electrical Nerve Stimulation)**
  This is a drug-free method of pain relief that works by blocking pain messages from reaching the brain. Your nurse or midwife will help you control a small, handheld TENS unit that is connected to electrodes placed on your lower back. TENS does not restrict your movement, and can be used at the same time as other coping methods. This method works best in early labor and for back labor.

- **Analgesics**
  These are narcotics (such as fentanyl) that are given through an IV into your vein, or by an injection into a muscle. These medications reduce pain without causing loss of feeling or an inability to use your muscles.

Anesthetics

Epidural analgesia is the most effective medical treatment for pain relief in labor. An epidural is an injection of medication into the lower back. It will reduce pain from the waist down without completely blocking feeling and movement. This means that you will be able to push when you are ready to deliver. We provide “Patient Controlled Epidural Analgesia” so that you can safely control the amount of medication you get over time. If your clinician recommends that you have a cesarean section, we will use a higher dose of medication that causes numbness from your breasts to your toes.