5 Tips to Help You Prepare for Labor

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

2. **Complete a birth preferences form.** This helps 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’ll 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.

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*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. Everyone copes with labor pain in their own way. It’s possible to reduce pain, but no method is guaranteed to take it away entirely.

Our hospitals offer a variety of coping options that include pain medicines as well as many nonmedical options. We’re here to support your coping and pain relief plan and to inform you about all the options available to you.

### 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.

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

**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.

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

**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. A hot shower may help too.

**Making a Change**
Try playing some distracting or soothing music. Changing the noise level, lighting, or temperature in the room may also help.

**Movement and Position**
Walking, rocking, and swaying can help make contractions easier to cope with. Using a birth ball or peanut ball and shifting positions may help.

### 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. Each hospital may offer different methods.

**TENS (Transcutaneous Electrical Nerve Stimulation)**
This is a drug-free method of pain relief that works by creating a vibration that may block some of the pain messages to your brain. You can control the intensity of the sensation using a small, handheld device connected to stickers placed on your lower back. TENS doesn’t affect your ability to move, and can be used at the same time as other coping methods. It works best for back labor.

**Sterile Water Injections**
This drug-free coping method involves placing a small amount of sterile water just under the skin on your low back. The injections create a stinging sensation that lasts about 60 seconds and then may help ease the pain of back labor for a couple of hours.

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

**Nitrous Oxide**
This is a colorless and odorless gas that you can safely inhale during contractions to help reduce the sensation of pain during labor.

**Anesthetics**
An epidural is an injection of medication into the lower back. It will reduce pain from the waist down without completely blocking pressure, feeling, or movement, and will last throughout labor and birth. Having a little sensation helps you be able to push when it’s time to deliver your baby.