

PAIN RELIEF

Reviewed: October 2024

Check with your provider and care team about the use of these medical and non-medical methods of pain relief before incorporating them into your routine or plan!

	Medical	Non-Medical
Pregnancy	Acetaminophen (Tylenol)	Changing positions Heat therapy Massage Physical therapy Prenatal yoga Nutrition, prenatal vitamin
Labor	Anesthesia: Spinal block Epidural block Analegia Nitrous oxide or "Laughing gas" Fentanyl or Morphine (opioids)	Changing positions Warm shower or bath Walking Massage Muscle stimulator Music, audio analgesia Aromatherapy
Postpartum	Ibuprofen (Advil) Acetaminophen (Tylenol)	Heating pad Ice pack, cold gel pack Sitz bath Numbing spray

PREGNANCY

Medical pain relief:

- **Acetaminophen** (Tylenol) is the only pain medication that is considered safe to use during pregnancy
 - However, just like any other medication taken during pregnancy: consult with your provider first and take in moderation, only as needed

Non-medical pain relief:

- Prenatal **yoga**
- **Healthy meals** to ensure you are consuming electrolytes and calcium can help reduce cramping. This is through a well-balanced diet and a good prenatal vitamin!
- **Massage**, heat therapy, warm baths or showers may help with body aches
- **Change positions** until you find something more comfortable
 - Examples: Elevating your feet with a footstool, sleeping on your side with a pillow in between your knees, using a pillow or maternity belt to support your lower back
- **Avoid laying down for a couple hours after eating** to help prevent heartburn or indigestion

LABOR

Medical pain relief:

- **Spinal block** – a thin needle is inserted into the spinal column, medicine is delivered, then the needle is removed. A spinal block is typically used for short procedures such as a planned C-section
- **Epidural block** – a thin needle is inserted into the lower back into an area around the spinal nerves (called the epidural space). Typically, with an epidural, a catheter or small thin tube is threaded through and the needle is removed. The pain-relieving medication is delivered through the catheter, which is kept in place to provide continuous relief throughout labor
- **Analgesics** are medications used to help relieve pain without taking away the sensation of feeling or ability to move your muscles
 - Examples: opioids like morphine or fentanyl, nitrous oxide (“laughing gas”)

Non-medical pain relief:

- **Positions to try laboring in:**
 - Asymmetrical kneeling
 - Assisted kneeling
 - Resting on hands and knees on the bed
 - Sitting on a birthing ball, or yoga ball
- **Warm shower or bath**, heating pad on lower back or abdomen
- **Walking** – may depend on birthing facility and whether pregnant person and baby needs to be continuously monitored
- **Massage** – applying firm pressure on pregnant person's hips may help during a contraction. In between contractions, massage on the shoulders, back or feet increase relaxation
- **Muscle stimulator (TENS machine)**
 - TENS = transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation
 - Electrical pads are applied to the area that you want to stimulate (e.g. lower back). The pads deliver electrical stimulation that may help with pain
- **Relaxing music**, audio analgesia (ex. “White noise”)
- **Aromatherapy**



POSTPARTUM

Medical pain relief:

- Ibuprofen (Advil) is preferred since little of the drug passes through into breastmilk
- Acetaminophen (Tylenol) is also safe
- Some providers may prescribe low doses of a mild opioid for a short duration if needed
 - FDA recommends against codeine or tramadol use for breastfeeding women

Non-medical pain relief:

- Heating pad for uterine cramping ("afterpains") or back/joint pain

C-section incision care

- Heating pad
- Compression belt/abdominal binder

Vaginal birth soreness

- Witch hazel pads, ice pack, or cold gel pack in perineal area
- Sitz bath
- Numbing spray or cream

Breast pain

- Breastfeeding can relieve pain and pressure from engorgement
- Applying warm washcloths or taking a warm shower before breastfeeding/expressing can make it easier for the milk to flow and help ease soreness
- If not breastfeeding, can wear a tight-fitting bra to help stop milk production
 - Applying ice packs may also help with soreness and discomfort

Sources:

- Cleveland Clinic Pregnancy Discomforts: <https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/articles/pregnancy-pains>
- American Family Physician: Over-the-Counter Medications in Pregnancy
- <https://www.aafp.org/pubs/afp/issues/2003/0615/p2517.html#afp20030615p2517-b5>
- ACOG: ACOG Response to Consensus Statement on Paracetamol Use During Pregnancy
- <https://www.acog.org/news/news-articles/2021/09/response-to-consensus-statement-on-paracetamol-use-during-pregnancy>
- ACOG: Postpartum Pain Management <https://www.acog.org/womens-health/faqs/postpartum-pain-management>
- UNC: Guidelines for management of postpartum pain following discharge from maternity care
- <https://cpcqc.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/UNC-Post-Discharge-Pain-Management-Guidelines.pdf>
- Mayo Clinic: Labor and delivery, postpartum care <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/labor-and-delivery/in-depth/postpartum-care/art-20047233>