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Ask an anaesthetist...

Anaesthesia and having a baby

Being pregnant and giving birth put a lot of pressure on our bodies. It's common to experience a degree of discomfort or pain during labour and there's a chance that you'll require surgery while you're pregnant. You might not need the care of an anaesthetist when you're carrying and delivering your baby, but it's good to know what your options are.

Can I have anaesthesia when I'm pregnant?

Surgical procedures involving all types of anaesthesia are generally safe for you and your baby at any stage in your pregnancy, as well as during breastfeeding. But every body is different, and some anaesthetic drugs or techniques may not be suitable in some situations.

Your anaesthetist will assess your condition and tailor your treatment to your individual needs. They'll also be happy to talk you through the process and answer any questions you have.

How do I manage discomfort during labour?

Your midwife and obstetrician will help you to manage mild and moderate birthing pain. But if you need stronger, longer lasting relief or require a caesarean delivery, they'll invite an anaesthetist to join your birthing team. An anaesthetist will be available at all major hospitals, but if you're planning to have your baby at a smaller hospital, you should check with your midwife.

You might not require the care of an anaesthetist when you're carrying and delivering your baby. But we're here if you need us!

How soon can feed my baby after having anaesthesia?

Unless you've had a caesarean delivery or been deeply sedated, you should be able to enjoy skin-to-skin contact straight away.

Will I need post-natal pain relief?

We can prescribe you suitable pain medication to manage post-partum or post-caesarean discomfort. Some medication may affect your ability to breastfeed immediately, but we'll discuss this with you.

Did you know...?

Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand are two of the safest places to have a surgical procedure involving anaesthesia, and our anaesthetists are among the most highly trained specialist doctors on the planet.



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As Australasia's leading authority on anaesthesia, ANZCA provides accessible, evidence-based information designed to help you make informed decisions. Scan the QR code to visit our website anzca.edu.au. This information is a guide only and should not replace information supplied by your anaesthetist.





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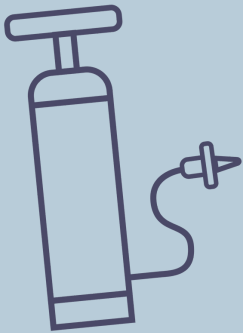
Ask an anaesthetist...

Managing discomfort during labour

Every birth is different, but it's common and natural to experience some degree of discomfort during labour. Your midwife and obstetrician can help you to manage mild and moderate birthing pain, but if you need stronger, longer lasting relief or require a caesarean delivery, they'll invite an anaesthetist to join your birthing team.

Relaxation techniques

When you go into labour, your midwife will usually suggest starting with some simple relaxation techniques such as stretches, massages, and breathing exercises. These will probably be familiar to you from antenatal classes. They can help you to feel more comfortable and in control of your contractions. If your partner is with you, they can also get involved.



Happy gas (AKA "laughing gas" or "gas and air")

Inhaling a mixture of oxygen and nitrous oxide gas (commonly called "laughing gas" or "gas and air") can help you to control your contractions and feel more relaxed. The gas is generally delivered through a mouthpiece which you can remove at any time. You can also control the rate of delivery. You'll still be fully aware, and able to move and experience sensation.

Opioid-based pain medication

If you start experiencing more severe discomfort, your obstetrician can give you an opioid-based pain medication such as morphine. This is generally injected into your muscle tissue. Opioids delivered in this way are generally safe to use at any stage of labour. They allow you to stay fully aware and able to experience sensation. They can provide highly effective and almost instant pain relief, but their effects are relatively short lasting.

Stronger and more sustained pain relief

If the happy gas and morphine aren't keeping you comfortable enough - or there's a chance you'll require a caesarean delivery - your obstetrician may ask an anaesthetist to join your birthing team to provide stronger, longer lasting pain relief.

If the happy gas and morphine aren't keeping you comfortable enough - or you require an unplanned caesarean delivery - you can always call on us!



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Epidural anaesthesia

Epidurals are an extremely effective and widely used way to manage severe birthing discomfort. They provide almost instant numbing of the lower body, and provide sustained pain relief that we can tailor to your needs to still allow a degree of movement and sensation.

Why would I need an epidural?

If the happy gas and morphine aren't keeping you comfortable enough - or there's a chance you'll require a caesarean delivery - your obstetrician may ask an anaesthetist to join your birthing team to provide stronger, longer lasting pain relief.

How does the epidural work?

Your anaesthetist will inject local anaesthetic (and sometimes also opioid-based medication such as morphine) in to the space around the spinal nerves in your lower back. This blocks the pain signals from contractions and cervical dilation travelling to your brain.

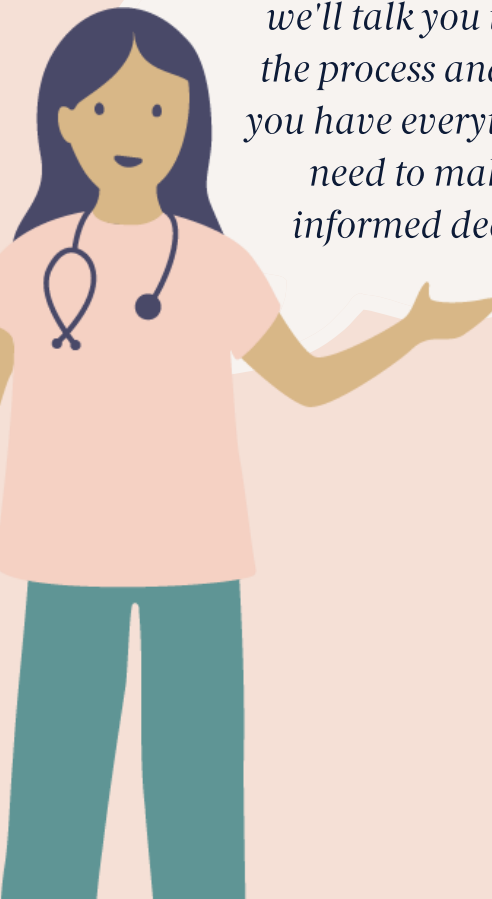
A fine plastic tube known as an "epidural catheter" may be threaded through the needle, which is then removed. This allows us to continue providing anaesthesia without needing to give you more injections.

When can I request an epidural?

As a general rule, you can request an epidural at any stage during labour provided there are no medical reasons not to, and following consultation with the midwife and/or obstetrician. An epidural procedure takes between five and 30 minutes to perform, with the onset of pain relief starting within five minutes of the local anaesthetic entering your body.

What if I need a caesarean ('c-section')?

If your obstetrician needs to perform a caesarean delivery we can easily use the epidural to give you a spinal block anaesthetic to numb your lower body. Because this is a surgical procedure, and the anaesthesia will be a lot stronger, your anaesthetist will be right by your side for the entire time. You'll usually be awake for the experience, but in some situations, we'll need to use a general anaesthetic to put you into a state of controlled unconsciousness during the operation..



If you need an epidural, we'll talk you through the process and ensure you have everything you need to make an informed decision.



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