

PLANNING YOUR CHILDBIRTH

Congratulations on the upcoming birth of your baby!

When you arrive to the obstetric suite in labor or for an induction of labor, the obstetric nurses will perform a variety of tasks. This will include receiving and signing some paper work, placing you and your baby on appropriate monitors, and starting an IV. You may or may not be in labor upon arrival to the hospital. Once your obstetric doctor determines that you are in “adequate labor”, you may be given one of the following choices in pain management to manage the pain of your delivery.

Systemic Pain medication

You will be given a pain medication to decrease the intensity of your pain. This medication may be placed into your IV.

Epidural Anesthesia

This is the most common method used to control the pain of a vaginal delivery. In this method of anesthesia, an anesthesia provider will be called to see you. After considering various medical factors, they will decide if an epidural anesthetic is a safe method of anesthesia for you. If it is determined that this is a safe anesthetic for you, then they will prepare your back for the placement of an epidural. An epidural involves the injection of certain drugs into your lower back that will cause the decrease in the pain sensation that you feel in the lower areas of your body. At the same time, it allows you to still stay alert and conscious. The purpose of the epidural is to make the labor a more tolerable process. It will not “numb you” to the point that you will not know when to “push” or feel too weak to push at the appropriate time. In the event of a cesarean section, the epidural can be used to provide adequate pain relief for your delivery.

Spinal Anesthesia

A spinal anesthetic is most likely to be used in settings where the patient is having a pre-scheduled caesarean delivery or a cesarean section before an epidural is placed. Like an epidural, a spinal anesthetic is injected into your lower back. It will bring on a short period of numbness for the delivery of the baby. Approximately one to two hours after the birth of the baby, the spinal anesthetic will wear away and normal feeling will return to your lower extremity.

General Anesthesia

General anesthesia is used to induce unconsciousness and pain relief over the entire body for the delivery of a baby via a cesarean section. This method of anesthetic will only be used if the patient is having a cesarean section and is not a candidate for other methods of anesthesia.

No anesthesia

Some patients are able to breathe through the intensity of their contractions without asking for pain medications. Other patients may be able to breathe through the intensity of their contractions and only choose to ask for a few doses of systemic medication. After the delivery of the baby, your obstetrician may choose to inject a small dose of local anesthesia to numb certain areas of the vaginal canal or the exterior that might be painful after the birth of your baby.

What is the “best” method of anesthesia for me?

There is no method of anesthesia that is pre-determined to be “best” for you. The best anesthetic method in a particular case will depend on many factors including your preference, medical conditions, pain tolerance, and the health of your baby. It is not uncommon for a woman to have a different anesthetic for the delivery of her different children. Have a discussion with your obstetric doctor about your choice of anesthetic close to the end of your pregnancy and before your estimated delivery date. During your labor process, you will continue to engage in discussion with your obstetric doctor. If you request an anesthetic, then the anesthesiologist will visit you and be involved in your care.