

## **Nitrous Oxide, commonly called "Laughing Gas", for Labor**

- **What is it exactly?**

Nitrous oxide used for labor pain is a mixture of 50% nitrous gas and 50% oxygen that is inhaled through a mask. It is used widely in dental offices, where most people know of it as "laughing gas". It has been, and still is, widely used in Europe for labor.

- **How does it work?**

You hold your own mask and begin to inhale the gas mixture about 30 seconds before a contraction begins. Starting to inhale before a contraction begins helps the gas to reach its peak effect at about the same time as the contraction reaches its peak, providing the greatest relief.



- **Will the midwife or doctor be administering nitrous?**

No; the nitrous is self-administered by the laboring woman, breathing it in as you feel the need. Once you decide you want to use it, your midwife or obstetrician will order it and your nurse will set it up, and review how to use it.

- **Does it have any side effects?**

Some women have reported nausea after prolonged use; medication to help ease the nausea is available if that happens. It can also cause some unsteadiness when up, which is why there should always be a support person or staff person in the room when you would like to get out of the chair or bed, in case you need assistance.

- **Can I still be out of bed and use nitrous?**

Yes; you may be out of bed and use the nitrous as long as you are steady on your feet and either your support person or staff is present.

- **Is there any extra monitoring required?**

No; if you are eligible to have intermittent fetal monitoring, there is no extra monitoring required for nitrous to be used.

- **Can I use nitrous and have intravenous narcotics at the same time?**

No; the combination of narcotics and nitrous can slow your breathing so they would not be used together.

- **Can I use nitrous in the tub?**

No; you will not use nitrous oxide while also sitting in the tub. However, you may use it just prior to getting into the tub, or just after getting out of the tub.

## **Nitrous Oxide, commonly called "Laughing Gas", for Labor**

▪ **Are there any reasons I could not use it?**

Yes: you cannot use it if you:

- cannot hold your own facemask;
- have received a dose of narcotic in the past 2 hours;
- have pernicious anemia or a B12 deficiency for which you take B12 supplements;
- have one of a very few other rare medical conditions which your midwife or obstetrician will speak with you about.

▪ **Are there any effects on baby?**

No; there are no known effects on the baby; nitrous is the only pain relief method used for labor that is cleared from the body through the lungs, so as soon as you pull the mask away, the nitrous effect is gone within a breath or two.

▪ **Do I have to choose between either using nitrous oxide OR having an epidural?**

No; some women may use nitrous prior to having an epidural placed. Though they would not be used together (the epidural and nitrous), it is perfectly fine to use nitrous first, and then move on to a different type of pain relief if you find you need to change to something else.

