

# Nitrous Oxide Use During Labor



It is the goal of UPMC Pinnacle Harrisburg to give our patients choices in selecting pain management that will best meet their needs.

Nitrous oxide has been used extensively worldwide as a primary form of pain relief (analgesia) for labor and birth.

## UPMC Pinnacle

Harrisburg

# FAQs

## What is nitrous oxide?

Nitrous oxide (also known as nitrous or laughing gas) is a colorless, nonflammable, tasteless, and odorless gas. It is self-administered on demand by the patient. The system uses 50 percent nitrous oxide mixed with 50 percent oxygen. We will instruct you on how to use nitrous. Usually within 15 seconds women feel more relaxed. Your pain will not be totally gone but will become more manageable.

## Is nitrous oxide safe for my baby and me?

The 50/50 mixture of gas and air has been shown to have few side effects. It has a long record of safe outcomes for both mother and baby. You and your baby will be checked before nitrous is started and intermittently during labor to make sure you are both well.

## When can I use nitrous?

Nitrous may be used in any stage of labor or pushing and after birth, as long as you and the baby have been checked and remain well.

## What if I don't like it? May I try different pain relief?

Nitrous is very fast acting and can be discontinued very quickly. Stop breathing into the mask and tell your nurse you would like to stop using it. Nitrous effects go away within a few minutes of breathing normally. If you prefer different pain medication or an epidural, the nurse will notify your provider.

## How do I use the mask?

You must hold the mask to your face. No one is allowed to help you hold the mask.

- Place the mask tightly on your face, covering your nose and mouth.
- Inhale with a deep breath and exhale back into the mask.
- It is very important that you breathe out with the mask covering your nose and mouth. The nitrous that you exhale will go into a collection tube and not into the room.
- Try to inhale 30 seconds before the contraction.
- After inhaling and exhaling into the mask, remove it until you need to use it again.
- When you need it, go through the same steps as above.

## Are there any side effects?

You may experience nausea, vomiting, or lightheadedness.

## Can someone help me use nitrous oxide?

No. You should be the only person controlling the amount of nitrous oxide you receive.

## Are there any reasons I could not use nitrous oxide?

You cannot use nitrous oxide if you:

- Cannot hold your own facemask
- Have a severe vitamin B12 deficiency
- Have a medical condition that your health care provider will assess you for during your medical history

**Please discuss questions with your provider or nurse. Your concerns and comfort are very important to us, and we welcome any questions.**

**Thank you for choosing UPMC Pinnacle Harrisburg for your birth experience!**

This information is provided to you as a guide only and is not intended to be a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. If you have questions about your health, physical fitness, or medical condition, you should seek the advice of your physician or health care provider.

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