



## PAIN RELIEF OPTIONS IN LABOUR – EPIDURAL AND BEYOND

### Manage the pain

Undoubtedly, labour is one of the most intense experiences a woman's body can go through. While every woman experiences labour differently, managing pain effectively can make the journey more comfortable and less stressful. Today, mothers have several pain relief options available during childbirth — from medical interventions like epidurals to natural coping techniques.

### The most popular medical option

An epidural is one of the most effective and commonly used methods of labour pain relief and to help relieve labour pain during childbirth. In this technique, an anaesthesiologist inserts a small needle and then a thin catheter into the epidural space in the lower back under sterile precautions, through which pain-relieving medicines (usually local anaesthetics with or without opioids) are administered continuously or intermittently. The procedure is usually given when labour is established, and it significantly reduces the pain of uterine contractions while allowing the mother to remain awake, alert, and actively participate in the delivery process.

Modern low-dose epidural techniques provide good analgesia with minimal motor weakness, so many women can still move their legs to some extent. Continuous monitoring of maternal blood pressure, pulse, foetal heart rate and labour progress is important after administration because temporary side effects such as hypotension, shivering, urinary retention, itching or incomplete block may occur. Serious complications like infection, nerve injury or epidural hematoma are rare. Epidural analgesia can also be beneficial in prolonged labour, high-risk pregnancies, multiple gestation or when operative delivery becomes necessary.



### Spinal Block and Combined Spinal-Epidural

A spinal block is another form of pain relief often used during caesarean sections or late-stage labour. It acts quickly but lasts for a shorter duration than an epidural. Some hospitals also offer a combined spinal-epidural technique, which provides rapid pain relief along with the flexibility of continued medication during labour.

### Intravenous Pain Medications

Certain medicines can be given through an injection or IV drip to reduce discomfort. These medications help women relax but may cause drowsiness or nausea. They are usually used in early labour or when epidurals are not suitable.

### Which is the right option?

There is really no “one-size-fits-all” approach to labour pain relief. A woman's medical condition, pain tolerance, birth plan and labour progress all influence the best choice. It is best to discuss options with the obstetrician well before delivery.

The ultimate goal of course is a safe delivery and a positive birth experience.