# **Queensland Clinical Guidelines**

Translating evidence into best clinical practice

Maternity and Neonatal Clinical Guideline

# Intrapartum pain management



Document title:	Intrapartum pain management	
Publication date:	February 2023	
Document number:	MN23.75-V1-R28	
Document supplement:	The document supplement details development processes and implementation activities, and is integral to and should be read in conjunction with this guideline	
Amendments:	Full version history is supplied in the document supplement	
Amendment date:	New document February 2023	
Replaces document:	New document	
Author:	Queensland Clinical Guidelines	
Audience:	Health professionals in Queensland public and private maternity and neonatal services	
Review date:	February 2028	
Endorsed by:	Queensland Clinical Guidelines Steering Committee Queensland Maternity and Neonatal Clinical Network	
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**Recommended citation:** Queensland Clinical Guidelines. Intrapartum pain management. Guideline No. MN23.75-V1-R28. Queensland Health. 2023. Available from: <u>http://www.health.gld.gov.au/gcg</u>

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#### Flowchart: Summary of intrapartum pain management

## **Good practice points**

- Discuss labour pain management antenatally, early in labour, intermittently during labour
- Share information to support decision making and enhance sense of autonomy
- Consider values, beliefs, culture, expectations, intentions, previous experiences
- Support the woman's preferences, choices and promote a flexible approach
- · Create clinical spaces that feel calm, safe and private

- Provide known carers whenever possible
- Sensitively discuss normal labour sensations as physiological and purposeful-less fear, intervention and greater self-efficacy
- Encourage support person/s to provide continuous presence, praise and advocacy
- If heightened anxiety or fear of childbirth, offer additional support/referral
- Audit feedback about pain management and impact on birth experience
- Consider environmental impact of pain relief strategies

#### Non-pharmacological strategies

- Align strategies with the body's physiology/psychology to alter or change response to labour sensations/pain
- Offer reduction in pain intensity with few or no adverse effects

•

· Combine strategies/use alongside pharmacological agents (if chosen) to increase relief

• Massage, touch, warmth

Gate control theory

Movement, active

#### **Neurotransmitter release**

- Acupuncture
- Acupressure
- Distraction
- Sterile water injections
- TENS Water immersion

positioning

#### Pharmacological options

- · Consider side effects and impact on labour and birth
- Efficacy and outcomes unclear due to conflicting findings and limited high quality evidence

#### Nitrous oxide/oxygen

- Mild inhalation analgesia • Use in any stage of active
- labour Consider contraindications
- Side effects (e.g. nausea, vomiting, dizziness)
- Self administer only
- Coach with breathing: inhale-exhale via mask/ mouthpiece
- Combine with other strategies (e.g. TENS)
- Use in well ventilated space
- Use safety equipment (e.g. filters) and demand valve to reduce occupational exposure

Opioids

- Variable analgesic response
- Follow local prescribing protocols
- Side effects (e.g. nausea, vomiting, drowsiness, sedation, dysphoria)
- Consider anti-emetic
- Changes in FHR more likely
- Consider estimated TOB prior to administration and possible post-natal impacts
- If neuraxial analgesia isn't an option, consider remifentanil or fentanyl via PCA

#### Neuraxial analgesia

- Most effective pharmacological method
- · Use in any stage of labour following anaesthetic assessment
- May be clinically indicated (e.g. for hypertensive or cardiac conditions)
- Gain IV access
- Low concentration LA with opioid reduces motor block
- Additional surveillance (e.g. CEFM, motor weakness, block height)
- · Mobility assessment prior to active positioning
- Bladder management required
- May increase length of labour
- Increased likelihood of assisted birth, maternal hyperthermia, antibiotic use

CNS: central nervous system; >: greater than; TENS: transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation; TOB: time of birth, FHR: fetal heart rate, PCA: patient controlled analgesic, IV: intravenous; LA: local anaesthetic; CEFM: continuous electronic fetal monitoring; IDC: indwelling catheter

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- **CNS** activation Aromatherapy
- Breathing
- Hypnosis
- Mindfulness
- Yoga

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#### Abbreviations

CEFM	Continuous electronic fetal monitoring
CNS	Central nervous system
FHR	Fetal heart rate
IDC	Indwelling catheter (urinary)
IV	Intravenous
LA	Local anaesthetic
РСА	Patient controlled analgesia
SpO <sub>2</sub>	Peripheral capillary oxygen saturation
TENS	Transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation
UTI	Urinary tract infection

#### Definitions

Combined spinal/ epiduralA form of regional anaesthesia or analgesia in which medications are administered into the cerebrospinal fluid (spinal block) and into the epidural space through an epidural catheter.	
Epidural block	A type of regional anaesthesia or analgesia in which pain medications are given into the epidural space.
Gate Control Theory	Nociceptive fibres in the spine transmit sensations to the central nervous system (CNS). If these fibres are saturated with a range of sensations (massage, touch, warmth, ambulation) the transmission of pain may be reduced.
Multidisciplinary team	Membership of the healthcare team is influenced by the needs of the woman, availability of staff, and other local resourcing issues. May include but is not limited to: nurse, midwife, obstetrician, general practitioner, anaesthetist, feto-maternal specialist, social worker, counsellor or hospital liaison officer.
Neuraxial	Term that includes both spinal, epidural or combined spinal epidural.
Nociceptive pain	Activation of nerve fibres in response to noxious stimuli that the individual perceives as pain.
Non- pharmacological	Without the use of medication.
Opioid	A group of drugs, both naturally occurring and synthetic which act on opioid receptors to provide analgesia.
Spinal block	A type of regional anaesthesia or analgesia in which medications are administered into the cerebrospinal fluid.
Systemic/parenteral analgesics	Medications that provide pain relief affecting the entire body without causing loss of consciousness.
Woman/women	In QCG documents, the terms <i>woman</i> and <i>women</i> include people who do not identify as women but who are pregnant or have given birth.

# 1 Introduction

The physiological response to birth creates sensations and pain that each woman experiences in a unique and individual way. The approach and management of labour pain can contribute significantly to a woman's overall satisfaction with the birth experience.<sup>1</sup> Effective pain management includes supporting the woman's choices and working 'with woman' to enhance the body's physiological responses during labour and birth.<sup>2</sup> The World Health Organisation advises caution in using "too many interventions too soon", and emphasises the need for woman centred care encompassing the woman's perspective, preferences and satisfaction with pain management.<sup>3</sup> This guideline is informed by a growing body of low to medium level evidence on pain management in labour and provides best practice guidance to inform woman centred, intrapartum pain management.

## 1.1 Clinical standards

Aspect	Consideration		
Standard care	<ul> <li>Refer to Queensland Clinical Guideline Standard care<sup>4</sup> for care considered 'usual' or 'standard', includes for example:         <ul> <li>Privacy, consent, documentation, decision-making, sensitive communication, medication administration for safety, staff education and support, culturally appropriate care</li> <li>A supportive birthing environment to promote neurophysiological and hormonal mechanisms to reduce pain, stress and fear<sup>5</sup></li> </ul> </li> <li>Refer to Queensland Clinical Guidelines: Normal birth<sup>6</sup></li> </ul>		
Labour companions	<ul> <li>Labour companions are chosen by the woman (e.g. partner, family, friend, birth companion, doula) and offer benefit in managing pain by<sup>7</sup>:</li> <li>Providing continuous presence, emotional support, encouragement and coaching</li> <li>Implementing non-pharmacological strategies</li> <li>Enhancing confidence and autonomy through praise and reassurance</li> <li>Advocating to support the woman's wishes, when needed</li> </ul>		
Supportive clinicians	<ul> <li>Attitudes to labour pain and the ability to communicate respect for a woman's choice, is fundamental to respectful maternity care<sup>3</sup></li> <li>Attentive, supportive, sensitive clinicians are valued<sup>8</sup></li> <li>A woman receiving midwifery continuity of care more frequently perceives labour pain positively, labours without analgesia and is more satisfied<sup>9,10</sup></li> <li>Refer to Queensland Clinical Guidelines: <i>Normal birth</i><sup>6</sup></li> </ul>		
Psychoeducation	<ul> <li>Psychoeducation is a recognised strategy to support information sharing and may reduce fear and anxiety around sensations and pain<sup>11</sup> <ul> <li>Commence in the antenatal period and involve labour companions</li> </ul> </li> <li>Discuss:             <ul> <li>Labour pain as a purposeful, normal, and physiological event<sup>3</sup></li> <li>An adaptive neurobiological state to pain may develop (e.g. acceptance of working with pain), when woman sees labour pain as beneficial<sup>12</sup></li> <li>The aim of pain management is preventing overwhelming, physiological and psychological responses (e.g. increased catecholamine release, changes in maternal circulation and reduced oxygenation)<sup>2</sup></li> </ul> </li> <li>Offer information about pain management options including<sup>13</sup>:         <ul> <li>Effectiveness, side effects for either woman or baby, additional monitoring (if any)</li> <li>Clinical outcomes for labour, birth, breastfeeding</li> <li>Availability or access (e.g. epidural)</li> <li>Refer to Queensland Clinical Guidelines: <i>Consumer information: Managing labour and birth</i><sup>14</sup></li> </ul> </li> <li>If high levels of anxiety, trauma or fear specific to childbirth are identified, offer additional support (e.g. mindfulness program)<sup>15,16</sup></li> <li>Refer as required (e.g. perinatal mental health, social worker)</li> </ul>		
Environmental impact	<ul> <li>Consider environmental impacts of pain relief strategies (e.g. disposable packaging, electricity usage, harvesting of essential oils)</li> <li>Nitrous oxide is a potent greenhouse gas with an estimated carbon footprint much higher than other types of analgesia<sup>17,18</sup></li> <li>Recommended system maintenance schedules identify pipeline gas leaks to reduce waste<sup>19</sup></li> </ul>		

Table 1. Foundations of pain management in labour

## 2 Assessment of labour pain

Table 2. Responsive assessment of la	abour pain
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Aspect	Consideration	
Individual experiences	<ul> <li>Satisfaction with pain management is multidimensional and influenced by<sup>1,12,20,21</sup>:         <ul> <li>Culture, genetics, environment</li> <li>Previous experiences</li> <li>Pre-birth expectations for childbirth</li> <li>Psychological and physiological responses to childbirth</li> <li>Clinical circumstances (e.g. induced labour, assisted birth<sup>22</sup>)</li> <li>Involvement in decision-making</li> <li>Quality of relationship with clinicians (e.g. midwifery caseload<sup>9,10</sup>)</li> </ul> </li> <li>Feeling unsupported may increase unanticipated use of pharmacological analgesia, and feelings of guilt and failure<sup>1</sup></li> </ul>	
Assessment	<ul> <li>Measurement of labour pain intensity is complex and subjective<sup>21</sup></li> <li>There is no objective method or validated tool to assess labour pain<sup>12</sup></li> <li>Pain intensity scales may be numerical or categorical<sup>12</sup></li> <li>Early assessment and support during early labour (e.g. phone contact) increases satisfaction and reduces rates of epidural<sup>23</sup></li> <li>Understanding the woman's views about labour pain informs individualised pain assessment and experience<sup>1</sup></li> <li>If a woman prefers less intervention, working with non-pharmacological strategies may be more important than eliminating pain<sup>8</sup></li> <li>If expecting pain to be relieved, or there is fear of pain, pharmacological methods may be more important<sup>24,25</sup></li> <li>Ask about the woman's perception of<sup>25</sup>:</li> <li>Labour sensations and level of satisfaction</li> <li>Management strategies compared to intentions and preferences</li> </ul>	
Recommendation	<ul> <li>Support women in their choices and preferences<sup>1,25</sup> <ul> <li>Promote a flexible approach to available pain management options <sup>1</sup></li> <li>Utilise the woman's birth plan if available</li> </ul> </li> <li>Support autonomy through positive language and encouragement<sup>23</sup></li> <li>Sensitively discuss labour sensation and pain in the context of purposeful, normal physiological event to enhance self-efficacy and lessen fear<sup>5,21</sup></li> <li>Reassess the woman's pain and satisfaction as indicated (e.g. changing clinical circumstances, stage of labour)<sup>12</sup></li> </ul>	

# 3 Non-pharmacological strategies

Table 3. Support for non-pharmacological strategies

Aspect	Consideration	
Context	<ul> <li>Many non-pharmacological strategies offer benefits, with no or few side effects<sup>26</sup></li> <li>Some self-initiated strategies may be outside the multidisciplinary healthcare team's scope of practice, including:         <ul> <li>Strategies set by independent or complementary health practitioners or therapists (e.g. aromatherapy, acupressure, hypnotherapy)</li> <li>Culture, family traditions (e.g. Bush medicine)</li> </ul> </li> <li>Combining several strategies alongside pharmacological agents (if used) may increase overall pain management effectiveness<sup>5,27</sup></li> </ul>	
Physiological models	<ul> <li>Theoretical models suggest the body's physiological processes can be altered in response to pain<sup>5</sup>:         <ul> <li>Gate control theory—competing stimuli block pain transmission</li> <li>Diffuse noxious inhibitory control—other sensations trigger neurotransmitter release</li> <li>Central nervous system (CNS) activation—thought and mental training trigger response from amygdala and limbic system</li> </ul> </li> <li>Individual strategies may have elements of multiple theoretical models</li> </ul>	

## 3.1 Non-pharmacological options

There are a range of safe and commonly used strategies. Antenatal information and practice prior to labour may improve effectiveness.  $^{\rm 12}$ 

Table 4.	Non-pharmac	ological	options
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Theory/Therapy		Consideration
	Breathing	• Focused breathing (e.g. Lamaze method) reduces pain and anxiety <sup>28</sup>
ivation	Aromatherapy	<ul> <li>Reduces anxiety and labour pain intensity<sup>26,29</sup></li> <li>Increased sense of calmness and wellbeing<sup>29,30</sup></li> <li>Insufficient evidence to recommend specific essential oils and/or method of administration<sup>29</sup> <ul> <li>Women commonly self-initiate use of essences or oils (e.g. lavender)<sup>5,26,31</sup></li> <li>Consider the impact on the baby's sensitive olfactory system during initial extrauterine adaptation (e.g. room diffusers may be overwhelming)<sup>5</sup></li> </ul> </li> </ul>
NS ac	Relaxation	<ul> <li>Reduces pain intensity particularly in the latent phase and increased satisfaction with pain relief<sup>32</sup></li> </ul>
Ö	Music	• Lowers anxiety and pain intensity in early labour <sup>32,33</sup>
	Mindfulness	<ul> <li>Increases a woman's sense of autonomy<sup>32</sup></li> </ul>
	Hypnosis	<ul> <li>Associated with a reduction in overall use of analgesia (except epidural) with no increase in adverse events<sup>30,34</sup></li> </ul>
	Yoga	<ul> <li>Reduces pain<sup>26</sup> and increases satisfaction<sup>32</sup></li> <li>May shorten length of labour<sup>26</sup></li> </ul>
0	Distraction	• Distractive strategies reduce pain (e.g. virtual reality, chewing gum) <sup>35</sup>
ansmitter release	Sterile water injections	<ul> <li>Safe intervention associated with reduced pain<sup>30,36</sup></li> <li>30–50% reduction in back pain for up to 90 minutes post injection<sup>36</sup></li> <li>Variation in techniques exist (e.g. single, paired, four—four injection technique for back pain has longer duration<sup>37</sup>)</li> <li>Two people administering injections at the same time may reduce administration pain<sup>38</sup></li> </ul>
urotra	Acupuncture	<ul> <li>May reduce pain and use of pharmacological options, whilst increasing maternal satisfaction<sup>39</sup></li> </ul>
Ne	Acupressure	<ul> <li>May reduce labour pain intensity<sup>39,26</sup></li> <li>May shorten length of labour<sup>26</sup></li> </ul>
	Massage and touch	<ul> <li>Reduces severity of pain and anxiety in first stage labour<sup>26,28,40</sup></li> <li>Increased sense of autonomy and overall satisfaction<sup>40</sup></li> </ul>
Gate control	Water and warmth	<ul> <li>Superficial heat from hot packs, moist towels, heated silica packs, shower and bath—to avoid burns:         <ul> <li>Test heat on caregiver's skin</li> <li>If using hot pack, apply one or two layers of cloth between woman's skin and pack<sup>30</sup></li> <li>Avoid if neuraxial analgesia administered</li> </ul> </li> <li>Warm showers relieve labour pain, release tension and ease backache<sup>40</sup>, encourage relaxation and mobilisation<sup>30</sup></li> <li>Perineal warm compresses in second stage are associated with reduced pain, increased birth satisfaction<sup>30</sup>and fewer third and fourth degree tears<sup>41</sup></li> <li>Refer to Queensland Clinical Guidelines: Perineal care<sup>42</sup></li> <li>Refer to Section3.1.2 Water immersion</li> </ul>
	Movement, positioning, birth ball	<ul> <li>Provide space and equipment to support use of active positioning and movement</li> <li>Promotes comfort, relaxation, mobility, active birth positioning, increase pelvic dimensions and builds confidence to manage pain<sup>43</sup></li> <li>Less pain reported in the first stage of labour with use of birth ball<sup>30</sup></li> </ul>
	TENS	<ul> <li>Transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation (TENS)</li> <li>Refer to Table 5. TENS therapy</li> </ul>

## 3.1.1 TENS therapy

#### Table 5. TENS therapy

Aspect	Consideration
Access	<ul> <li>Availability according to local protocol</li> <li>Woman may be required to bring their own TENS unit or hire privately</li> </ul>
Benefits <sup>44,45</sup> :	<ul> <li>Reduces labour pain and delays need for pharmacological strategies</li> <li>May reduce length of labour</li> <li>Promotes release of endorphins and serotonin and reduces catecholamines</li> <li>Non-invasive method</li> <li>Easy to apply</li> <li>No impact on woman's mobility</li> <li>No known adverse effects on baby</li> </ul>
Cautions <sup>44,45</sup> :	<ul> <li>Avoid use if:</li> <li>Previous history of pacemaker or spinal metal rods</li> <li>Showering or bathing</li> <li>Limited sensation (e.g. neuraxial analgesia)</li> <li>Avoid applying electrodes over damaged skin</li> <li>Do not use hot packs directly over the electrodes</li> </ul>
Application and use	<ul> <li>Follow directions of manufacturer and/or local protocols</li> <li>Most effective when two pairs of electrodes are placed at the paravertebral regions aligned with thoracic vertebra 10–11 and sacral vertebra 2–4<sup>45,46</sup></li> <li>A variety of TENS technologies are available, some may have several program options (e.g. labour option)<sup>45</sup></li> <li>Using low voltage currents (e.g. frequency: 80–100 Hertz) and higher pulse widths (e.g. 220–350 microseconds<sup>46</sup>) are effective</li> <li>The woman titrates the intensity according to her pain</li> <li>Some TENS units have a boost option for application during contractions</li> <li>Reapplication of gel may be required depending on the type of equipment</li> </ul>

#### 3.1.2 Water immersion

This guideline discusses water immersion during labour for pain management. For waterbirth, refer to Queensland Clinical Guidelines: *Normal birth.*<sup>6</sup>

Table 6.	Water	immersion
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Aspect	Consideration		
Context	<ul> <li>Water immersion during established labour is an effective strategy for pain relief for healthy women<sup>47</sup> <ul> <li>Women report both psychological and physiological relief<sup>48</sup></li> </ul> </li> <li>Clinical outcomes for women using water immersion (low risk pregnancy at term) include<sup>47,49,50</sup>:         <ul> <li>No greater adverse outcomes</li> <li>Slight reduction in use of neuraxial analgesia</li> <li>Less need for augmentation (labour may slow but overall is associated with shorter labour<sup>51</sup></li> <li>No difference in mode of birth</li> <li>Reduces labour pain intensity<sup>48,52</sup></li> <li>Increases maternal satisfaction with birth experience<sup>48,53</sup></li> </ul> </li> </ul>		
Assessment	<ul> <li>Develop/follow local protocols to support water immersion in labour</li> <li>Perform an individualised assessment using clinical judgement to balance risk factors and the needs and safety of each woman<sup>54</sup> including:         <ul> <li>Ability to enter and exit the bath with minimal assistance</li> <li>Availability of resources (human and equipment) to assist exiting the water (if this becomes necessary)</li> <li>Timing of opioid administration (e.g. avoid immersion if administered less than four hours previously<sup>55</sup>)</li> <li>Recommended antibiotic regime has been commenced prior to immersion, when:             <ul> <li>Group B Streptococccus positive [refer to Queensland Clinical Guidelines: <i>Early onset Group B Streptococcal disease<sup>56</sup></i>]</li> <li>Term prelabour rupture of membrane more than 18 hours [refer to Queensland Clinical Guidelines: <i>Term prelabour rupture of membranes</i><sup>57</sup>]</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> </ul>		
Water management	<ul> <li>Fill water to level of maternal breast or axilla when sitting</li> <li>Maintain water temperature according to local protocols</li> <li>Monitor water quality continuously and change water if debris present</li> </ul>		
Care during water immersion	<ul> <li>Continuous support from caregivers skilled in water immersion         <ul> <li>Follow local facility recommendations for training<sup>50</sup></li> </ul> </li> <li>Baseline assessment of maternal and fetal condition prior to entering water</li> <li>Additional observations:         <ul> <li>Temperature hourly during first stage</li> <li>If continuous electronic fetal monitoring (CEFM), use waterproof telemetry equipment<sup>50</sup></li> <li>Whilst vaginal examination (VE) may be carried out in the water<sup>50</sup> encouraging the woman to leave bath will enable thorough assessment</li> </ul> </li> <li>Encourage regular fluid intake to maintain hydration<sup>6</sup></li> <li>Prepare for unintended water birth<sup>50</sup> (e.g. rapid birth or maternal decision)         <ul> <li>Ensure a second caregiver is immediately available</li> <li>Refer to Queensland Clinical Guidelines: Normal birth<sup>6</sup></li> </ul> </li> </ul>		
Exiting the bath	<ul> <li>If water birth not intended, allow adequate time to exit the bath</li> <li>Follow local protocols, criteria may include<sup>50</sup>:         <ul> <li>Fetal heart rate (FHR) abnormalities on auscultation or CEFM</li> <li>Liquor stained with meconium/blood</li> <li>Maternal temperature elevated: equal or greater than 38°C, or 37.5 °C on two consecutive occasions</li> </ul> </li> <li>Refer or consult as indicated</li> </ul>		
Perineal care	<ul> <li>Conflicting evidence about effect on perineal trauma</li> <li>Refer to Queensland Clinical Guideline: Perineal care<sup>42</sup></li> </ul>		

## 4 Pharmacological options

## 4.1 Nitrous oxide and oxygen

Table 7. Nitrous oxide and oxygen

Aspect	Considerations			
Context	<ul> <li>Mild inhaled analgesic<sup>58</sup>, assists relaxation, reduces anxiety, may increase woman's sense of autonomy<sup>59,60</sup></li> <li>Rapid onset and offset (approximately 50 seconds to reach full effect)<sup>59,61</sup></li> <li>Rapidly crosses the placenta, however no changes in Apgar score or page at a second secon</li></ul>			
Cautions	<ul> <li>If COVID-19 suspected or confirmed <ul> <li>Refer to Queensland Clinical Guideline: Maternity care for mothers and babies during the COVID-19 pandemic<sup>62</sup>]</li> </ul> </li> <li>Sedation may be exacerbated by the use of systemic opioids<sup>63</sup></li> <li>Contraindications exist (e.g. pernicious anaemia<sup>59</sup>) however in well women and for short term labour analgesia, complications are unlikely*</li> </ul>			
Dosage and administration	<ul> <li>Suitable for all stages of active labour<sup>59</sup></li> <li>Self-administered intermittently by demand flow mask or mouthpiece<sup>59</sup> <ul> <li>Entonox<sup>®</sup> nitrous oxide and oxygen 50:50 mix, or</li> <li>Flow mixer: nitrous oxide and oxygen from 30:70 up to 70:30 mix</li> <li>No difference in women's satisfaction—Entonox<sup>®</sup> or flow mixer<sup>58</sup></li> <li>Titrate to individual effect and sensitivity<sup>58,64</sup></li> </ul> </li> <li>Offer support with breathing technique and timing for effective, intermittent administration<sup>60,65</sup></li> <li>Commence with onset of contraction (or 30 seconds prior)</li> <li>Advise to breathe deeply at normal rate, exhaling into mask or mouthpiece (minimises exposure of others) until contraction eases</li> </ul>			
Care during use	<ul> <li>Aim to achieve greater comfort, relaxed state, and minimal side effects (e.g. nausea, vomiting, dizziness, light-headedness)<sup>48</sup></li> <li>Offer antiemetics if indicated</li> <li>The woman holds the mask/mouthpiece to reduce the risk of oversedation<sup>65</sup></li> <li>Able to remain mobile<sup>65</sup></li> <li>Monitor sedation and respiratory effort during use<sup>65</sup></li> <li>Can be combined with other analgesia and strategies<sup>59</sup> (e.g. TENS or water immersion<sup>66</sup>)</li> <li>If overdose indicated by unconsciousness or decreased respiratory effort immediately cease and apply supplemental oxygen o Implement local emergency call protocols as required</li> </ul>			
Occupational health and safety	<ul> <li>Prolonged occupational exposure may cause health issues for clinicians (e.g. reduced fertility, disrupted vitamin B<sub>12</sub> synthesis)<sup>17,63</sup></li> <li>Use: <ul> <li>In rooms with adequate air ventilation<sup>63,67,68</sup></li> <li>Approved equipment to maximise safety for women and staff including filters, demand valve, scavenger systems to capture exhalation<sup>64,68</sup></li> </ul> </li> </ul>			
Comparison to other pharmacological options	<ul> <li>When compared to other pharmacological options:         <ul> <li>Provides less analgesic effectiveness than neuraxial analgesia<sup>69</sup></li> </ul> </li> <li>Greater user satisfaction and more effective pain relief at 120 minutes when compared to opioid (pethidine)<sup>70,71</sup></li> </ul>			

\*Consult a pharmacopeia for complete drug information

## 4.2 Systemic opioids

Table 8. Systemic opioids

Aspect	Consideration		
Context <sup>12</sup>	<ul> <li>In Australia, practice is varied and use of systemic opioids is declining<sup>12</sup></li> <li>Response to opioids is variable and many women continue to experience moderate to severe pain following administration<sup>72</sup></li> <li>Aim is to manage pain with the lowest dose to minimise side effects</li> <li>Administration route (intramuscular (IM), intravenous (IV), subcutaneous (SC)) and pattern (repeated or once only) results in highly variable absorptions rates and effects<sup>73</sup></li> <li>Effects on the newborn remain unclear<sup>72</sup></li> </ul>		
Action	<ul> <li>Acts on receptors in the central nervous system to lessen neurotransmitter excitatory response to pain<sup>12</sup></li> </ul>		
Cautions	<ul> <li>If the woman has substance use disorder, consider maternal and neonatal impacts and discuss alternate analgesia options <ul> <li>Refer to Queensland Clinical Guidelines: <i>Perinatal substance use: maternal</i><sup>74</sup> and</li> <li><i>Perinatal substance use: neonata</i><sup>75</sup>]</li> </ul> </li> <li>Can potentiate the action of other drugs (e.g. nitrous oxide and oxygen) that cause maternal CNS and respiratory depression<sup>76</sup></li> <li>If reduced blood volume (e.g. antepartum haemorrhage), increased risk of hypotension and respiratory depression</li> <li>Opioids readily cross into the placenta and may cause changes in the fetal heart rate (e.g. decreased variability)<sup>65</sup></li> <li>Refer to Queensland Clinical Guideline: <i>Intrapartum fetal surveillance</i><sup>77</sup></li> <li>Interval from administration to the time of birth may impact neonatal outcomes (e.g. less than four<sup>78</sup> to five hours<sup>79</sup>), (low level evidence)<sup>72</sup></li> <li>Refer to Queensland Clinical Guideline: <i>Neonatal resuscitation</i><sup>80</sup></li> <li>Consider direct supervision of baby during skin to skin contact and support breastfeeding initiation<sup>81,82</sup></li> <li>Refer to Queensland Clinical Guideline: <i>Establishing breastfeeding</i><sup>82</sup></li> </ul>		
Opioid of choice	<ul> <li>The opioid of choice for pain management during labour is unclear<sup>72</sup></li> <li>Follow local protocols for preferred prescribing</li> <li>Refer to: <ul> <li>Table 9. Morphine dosage and administration</li> <li>Table 10. Fentanyl dosage and administration</li> <li>Table 11. Remifentanil via patient controlled analgesic device</li> <li>Pethidine is not a preferred opioid<sup>3</sup>, when compared to other opioids due to higher rates of neonatal nursery admission<sup>81</sup>, and altered neurobehaviour up to 60 hours following birth<sup>81</sup></li> </ul> </li> </ul>		
Side effects	<ul> <li>Maternal dysphoria, sedation and drowsiness<sup>73</sup>:         <ul> <li>May feel dissociation from pain, rather than analgesic effect</li> <li>May impact capacity to fully engage in care and decision-making<sup>72</sup></li> <li>Nausea, vomiting<sup>73</sup></li> <li>Delayed gastric emptying, urinary retention<sup>12</sup></li> <li>Rash, pruritus<sup>73</sup></li> <li>Hypoventilation and desaturations<sup>73</sup></li> </ul> </li> </ul>		

#### 4.2.1 Morphine

Aspect	Consideration	
Local protocols	Follow preferred dosage, route, preparation and administration	
Dosage	• 5–10 mg	
Route	Intramuscular injection	
Expected	Analgesia peaks at 30–60 minutes following administration	
response	Duration of action 1–3 hours	
	Consider co-administration of an anti-emetic	
	<ul> <li>Routine intrapartum observations including:</li> </ul>	
Additional care	<ul> <li>Level of sedation (increased sedation almost always precedes</li> </ul>	
	respiratory depression <sup>12</sup> )	
	Monitor effectiveness of pain relief	
	Morphine preferred to pethidine due to:	
Comparison with	<ul> <li>Greater user satisfaction<sup>72</sup></li> </ul>	
other	<ul> <li>Less vomiting<sup>72</sup></li> </ul>	
	<ul> <li>Shorter half life<sup>83</sup></li> </ul>	

Table 9. Morphine dosage and administration

Consult a pharmacopeia for complete drug information

#### 4.2.2 Fentanyl

Table 10. Fentanyl dosage and administration

Aspect	Consideration
Local protocols	Follow preferred dosage, route, preparation and administration
Administration options <sup>81</sup> :	<ul> <li>Single injection subcutaneously or via subcutaneous cannula</li> <li>Intermittent doses via subcutaneous cannula:         <ul> <li>Cannula (e.g. 24 gauge) inserted in the sub clavicular or upper pectoral region</li> <li>Avoids need for pumps and administration devices, allows intermittent injection without repeated skin punctures</li> <li>Reduces total dose when compared to IV administration</li> </ul> </li> <li>If neuraxial analgesia is contraindicated, unachievable or unwanted, and remifentanil PCA is not available, can be administered via PCA according to local protocols*</li> </ul>
Single injection	<ul> <li>100–150 micrograms subcutaneous injection</li> </ul>
Subcutaneous cannula	<ul> <li>Initial 200 microgram bolus, then after one hour<sup>81</sup>:</li> <li>50 microgram every 15 minutes up to a maximum of 650 micrograms (if required)</li> </ul>
Duration of action	• 1–2 hours
Additional care	<ul> <li>Monitor effectiveness of pain relief and side effects         <ul> <li>If nausea, consider an anti-emetic</li> </ul> </li> <li>Routine intrapartum observations including level of sedation<sup>12</sup></li> </ul>
Comparison with other	<ul> <li>Fentanyl 100 times more potent than morphine<sup>84</sup></li> <li>Fentanyl preferred to pethidine<sup>81,85</sup></li> <li>Greater user satisfaction</li> <li>Less nausea</li> <li>Less sedation</li> <li>Safer in renal impairment</li> <li>Shorter labour</li> <li>Fewer admissions to nursery</li> <li>No adverse neonatal effects noted when cord bloods examined<sup>86</sup></li> <li>Less difficulty with breastfeeding</li> </ul>

\*Consult a pharmacopeia for complete drug information

#### 4.2.3 Remifentanil

Aspect	Consideration		
Indications	<ul> <li>A potent analgesic<sup>87</sup> only administered via patient controlled analgesia (PCA) device, during active labour when epidural is contraindicated, unachievable or unwanted<sup>88</sup> *</li> </ul>		
Safety considerations	<ul> <li>Requires<sup>89</sup>:         <ul> <li>Anaesthetic assessment prior to use</li> <li>Protocols for device setup and management</li> <li>Staff trained in administration and management</li> </ul> </li> <li>Concomitant use of other analgesics (e.g. opioids, sedatives, nitrous oxide and oxygen) not recommended unless prescribed by an anaesthetist<sup>89</sup></li> </ul>		
Dosage and administration	<ul> <li>Administer via dedicated IV access and (PCA) device<sup>89</sup></li> <li>Follow local protocols for:         <ul> <li>Recommended dose and lock out periods</li> <li>Concomitant anti-emetic, naloxone and oxygen prescriptions</li> <li>Device management, training, assignment of responsibility for care and escalation procedures</li> </ul> </li> </ul>		
Additional care	<ul> <li>One to one continuous midwifery care<sup>12,84</sup></li> <li>Baseline maternal and fetal observations prior to commencement<sup>12</sup></li> <li>Commence CEFM<sup>12</sup></li> <li>Continuous oxygen saturation (SpO<sub>2</sub> monitoring—maintain above 95%<sup>12,88</sup></li> <li>Routine intrapartum observations every 30 minutes <ul> <li>Refer to Queensland Clinical Guideline: <i>Normal birth</i><sup>6</sup></li> </ul> </li> <li>Review effectiveness of pain relief</li> <li>Clinical surveillance for decreased respiratory rate, hypotension, vomiting, muscle rigidity, pruritus and sedation<sup>88,89</sup></li> <li>Increasing sedation is the best early clinical sign of respiratory depression<sup>12</sup></li> </ul>		
Comparisons with other pharmacological strategies	<ul> <li>Approximately 200 times more potent than morphine<sup>87</sup></li> <li>Compared to other opioids, remifentanil users experienced<sup>87</sup>:         <ul> <li>Greater satisfaction</li> <li>Less pain (at one and two hours after administration)</li> <li>Less requirement for additional analgesia</li> <li>Less nausea and vomiting</li> <li>Less changes in FHR patterns</li> <li>No difference in neonatal outcomes</li> </ul> </li> <li>Compared to neuraxial analgesia, remifentanil users experienced<sup>87</sup>:         <ul> <li>Less satisfaction with pain relief</li> <li>More nausea and vomiting</li> <li>Increased incidence of maternal desaturations</li> </ul> </li> </ul>		

Table 11. Remiferitanil via patient controlled analog	aesic device

\*This indication is not specified on the Queensland Health List of Approved Medicines (LAM). Consult a pharmacopeia for complete drug information

## 4.3 Neuraxial analgesia

Table <sup>•</sup>	12.	Neuraxial	analgesia	considerations
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Aspect	Consideration		
Context	<ul> <li>A variety of techniques may be available, depending on clinical maternity service capability level<sup>90</sup> and resources including:         <ul> <li>Epidural, spinal, or combined spinal epidural (CSE)<sup>91</sup></li> </ul> </li> <li>Epidurals offer effective, reliable and flexible labour analgesia<sup>22,91</sup></li> <li>Women prefer information and discussion about epidural risks, benefits and procedure during the antenatal period to support decision making<sup>92</sup></li> <li>Refer to Queensland Clinical Guideline: <i>Managing labour and birth</i><sup>14</sup></li> </ul>		
Consult anaesthetic team	<ul> <li>All forms of neuraxial analgesia require anaesthetic consultation         <ul> <li>If pre-existing co-morbidities, antenatal consultation may benefit<sup>92</sup></li> <li>If difficult neuraxial placement is anticipated, consider early insertion along with neuraxial ultrasound<sup>12</sup></li> </ul> </li> <li>Individualise assessment<sup>65</sup>:         <ul> <li>Identify contraindications and alternatives</li> <li>Discuss benefits and risks, including impacts of co-existing medical conditions</li> <li>Consider the requirement for additional screening (e.g. platelet count)</li> <li>Review the woman's birth plan and expectations following insertion (e.g. impact on motor function<sup>93</sup>)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>		
Common side effects during labour* <sup>22</sup> :	<ul> <li>Hypotension</li> <li>Shivering</li> <li>Itchiness</li> <li>Urinary retention</li> <li>Motor blockage</li> <li>Fever</li> </ul>		
Effect on perinatal outcomes	<ul> <li>Increased         <ul> <li>Duration of labour (first and second stage)<sup>12</sup></li> <li>Risk of instrumental vaginal birth, particularly in nulliparous women<sup>65,94</sup></li> </ul> </li> <li>Increased incidence of a maternal fever following epidural<sup>22,94,95</sup> and greater use of antibiotics<sup>96,97</sup></li> <li>The cause of fever is unknown<sup>69</sup> and a high index of suspicion for infection is required</li> <li>Association of epidural-induced hyperthermia to neonatal brain injury is unknown<sup>95</sup></li> <li>Inconsistent evidence regarding<sup>96,98,99</sup>:         <ul> <li>Neonatal infection</li> <li>Admission to neonatal unit</li> <li>Apgar score</li> </ul> </li> </ul>		
Comparison to opioid analgesia in labour	<ul> <li>When compared to opioid analgesia, women with epidural analgesia experience<sup>22</sup>:</li> <li>Greater user satisfaction</li> <li>Less need for additional pain relief</li> <li>Less nausea and vomiting</li> <li>Less respiratory depression requiring oxygen</li> <li>More hypotension</li> <li>More maternal fevers</li> <li>More urinary retention</li> <li>More use of oxytocin for labour augmentation</li> <li>Increased length of labour</li> <li>More instrumental birth</li> </ul>		

\*Consult a pharmacopeia for complete drug information

## 4.3.1 Care during neuraxial analgesia use

Aspect	Consideration		
Safety considerations	<ul> <li>Close midwifery care         <ul> <li>One to one midwifery care for insertion and a minimum of 30 minutes following completion of an epidural procedure<sup>65</sup></li> </ul> </li> <li>Pregnancy related physiological changes and complications, may delay the recognition of complications associated with neuraxial procedures (e.g. local anaesthetic (LA) toxicity<sup>102</sup>, epidural haematoma, migration of the catheter<sup>12</sup>)         <ul> <li>Implement local emergency protocols as required</li> <li>Resuscitation equipment includes vasopressors and IV lipid emulsion<sup>65</sup></li> </ul> </li> </ul>		
Prior to epidural insertion	<ul> <li>Secure large bore IV access, commence IV fluids<sup>22,65</sup></li> <li>Follow local protocols for pathology (e.g. full blood count, group and hold)</li> <li>Baseline maternal and fetal observations<sup>65</sup>, commence/continue CEFM<sup>77</sup></li> <li>Encourage voiding (or note time of last void) and discuss a post-epidural bladder management plan<sup>103</sup></li> <li>Refer to Section 4.3.2: Bladder management</li> </ul>		
Dosage and administration	<ul> <li>Suitable at any stage of labour<sup>12</sup> <ul> <li>No significant differences in clinical outcomes for early versus late initiation (nine RCTs, n=15,752)<sup>104</sup></li> </ul> </li> <li>Follow local protocols for preferred prescribing, administration and documentation (e.g. pump checks, demand and delivery rates)</li> <li>Combined low concentration LA and opioids provide superior analgesia and results in shorter duration of second stage labour, fewer assisted births, greater ambulation and less urinary retention<sup>12</sup></li> <li>The choice of medications and dosages may reduce incidence of side effects without compromising safety<sup>105</sup></li> <li>Additional medications can be administered through the epidural if necessary (e.g. instrumental birth or emergency caesarean)</li> </ul>		
Supportive care	<ul> <li>Discuss the woman's plans and support normal birth strategies following neuraxial analgesia<sup>92,106</sup> <ul> <li>Refer to Queensland Clinical Guidelines: <i>Normal birth</i><sup>6</sup></li> </ul> </li> <li>Follow local protocols to support active positioning/mobility after an individual mobility assessment, including<sup>65,73</sup>:         <ul> <li>Bilateral straight leg raises against resistance</li> <li>Supervised stepping on a step stool with either leg and taking a step</li> <li>Satisfactory trial of walking with a clinician</li> <li>Always accompany when repositioning (to a weight bearing position) or mobilising<sup>73</sup></li> </ul> </li> <li>If immobile, incorporate pressure injury prevention strategies</li> </ul>		
Observations	<ul> <li>Follow local protocol</li> <li>During establishment of neuraxial analgesia and after intermittent bolus—five minutely blood pressure, CEFM, observe for early signs of complications (e.g. agitation, circumoral numbness<sup>102</sup>)</li> <li>Following establishment, ongoing intrapartum observations every 30 minutes, and in addition<sup>65</sup>:         <ul> <li>Sedation, motor weakness, back pain, check catheter site</li> <li>Sensory assessment of block height</li> <li>Side effects (e.g. pruritis)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>		
Second stage	<ul> <li>Continue epidural analgesia until after birth—early discontinuation results in inadequate analgesia and decreased maternal satisfaction<sup>107</sup></li> <li>Support the woman in a position of comfort to provide greater satisfaction<sup>108</sup> (e.g. lying down in a lateral position rather than supine)</li> <li>Upright positions in second stage following neuraxial analgesia are not shown to reduce instrumental birth<sup>108</sup></li> <li>Refer to Queensland Clinical Guideline: <i>Perineal care</i><sup>42</sup> for pushing methods</li> </ul>		

Table 13. Intrapartum care of a woman with neuraxial analgesia

#### 4.3.2 Bladder management

Aspect	Good practice points
Context	<ul> <li>Routine indwelling urinary catheterisation (IDC) is common following neuraxial analgesia to minimise:<sup>103,109</sup> <ul> <li>Intrapartum and post-partum urinary retention</li> <li>Bladder over distention injury</li> <li>Delay in fetal descent due to obstruction by a distended bladder</li> </ul> </li> <li>Hospital acquired urinary tract infections (UTI) associated with IDCs are common health care related infections<sup>110</sup></li> <li>No difference between intermittent and continuous catheterisation for rates of<sup>111</sup>:             <ul> <li>UTI</li> <li>Postnatal urinary retention</li> <li>Postpartum haemorrhage</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Preferred management	<ul> <li>Follow local protocols</li> <li>Consider<sup>103</sup>:         <ul> <li>Woman's preference</li> <li>Estimated number of intermittent catheterisations (e.g. parity, stage and progress of labour, time for medication effects to resolve)</li> <li>Factors impeding ability to palpate bladder (e.g. obesity<sup>103</sup>)</li> <li>Requirement for hourly urine measurement (e.g. pre-eclampsia)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
IDC	<ul> <li>Plan time for removal, considering<sup>112</sup>:         <ul> <li>Time for effect of neuraxial analgesics to wear off</li> <li>Factors that may increase risk of voiding dysfunction (e.g. prolonged labour, assisted birth, perineal swelling)<sup>112</sup></li> </ul> </li> </ul>
If intermittent catheterisation	<ul> <li>May be offered when only two episodes are anticipated<sup>112</sup></li> <li>Assessment and catheterisation is required approximately two hourly<sup>103</sup></li> <li>Consider using male length intermittent catheter to reach bladder in the event of elongated urethra during labour</li> </ul>
If no catheter	<ul> <li>If no catheterisation:         <ul> <li>Support to void within one hour of epidural insertion, and then at least every two hours<sup>65,103</sup></li> <li>If unable to void, palpate abdomen to identify bladder distention<sup>65,103</sup></li> </ul> </li> <li>If distended or unable to void after four hours<sup>65</sup>, recommend catheterisation</li> </ul>
Recommendation	<ul> <li>Implement a bladder management plan within one hour of epidural insertion<sup>103</sup></li> </ul>

#### 4.3.3 Discontinuing the epidural

Table 15. Discontinuing the epidural

Aspect	Consideration
Timing	<ul> <li>Following birth continued neuraxial analgesia may be required (e.g. perineal repair)</li> <li>Refer to Queensland Clinical Guideline: <i>Venous thromboembolism (VTE)</i> prophylaxis in pregnancy and the puererium<sup>113</sup></li> </ul>
Documentation	<ul> <li>Document removal date, time and condition of catheter tip (e.g. intact)<sup>65</sup></li> <li>Notify anaesthetic team if tip is incomplete</li> </ul>
Observation following removal	<ul> <li>Continue to monitor motor function and proprioception for the first 24 hours according to local protocol, including:         <ul> <li>Assess motor function prior to mobilisation due to increased risk of falls<sup>65</sup></li> <li>Notify anaesthetist is block persists after six hours, or new or increasing weakness or sensations</li> </ul> </li> <li>Monitor for and provide information to the woman about, possible complications (e.g. urinary retention, headache)<sup>65</sup></li> </ul>

# 5 Woman's satisfaction with pain management

Table 16. Satisfaction with pain management

Aspect	Consideration
Context <sup>114</sup> :	<ul> <li>Reviewing the woman's emotional needs postnatally includes discussing her labour and birth experience, including pain management</li> <li>Improved postnatal psychological functioning is found when expectations and experience are matched about labour and birth, and/or there is an understanding of the care experience</li> </ul>
Recommendation <sup>114</sup> :	<ul> <li>Following birth, review the woman's experience and level of satisfaction with pain management strategies</li> <li>If the woman expresses dissatisfaction, consider further follow up (e.g. a formal debrief with clinicians involved)</li> <li>Feedback from women on satisfaction with labour pain management informs maternity systems review</li> </ul>

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## Acknowledgements

Queensland Clinical Guidelines gratefully acknowledge the contribution of Queensland clinicians and other stakeholders who participated throughout the guideline development process particularly:

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#### Funding

This clinical guideline was funded by Healthcare Improvement Unit, Queensland Health