



Nurturing Your Journey

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A GUIDE FROM MY DOULA DAWN

Understanding *Pain* Management

Your Full Range of Options, Explained

Knowing your options for pain management is one of the most empowering things you can do before labor. Whether you lean toward natural techniques, medication, or a mix of both is entirely your call, and you'll have support no matter what you choose.

WHAT'S INSIDE

- ✦ Why pain doesn't have to mean suffering
- ✦ The 3 R's: relaxation, rhythm, ritual
- ✦ Natural techniques for coping with labor pain
- ✦ Medical pain relief options, explained plainly

UNDERSTANDING PAIN

Pain Doesn't Have to Mean Suffering

While labor is often associated with pain, it doesn't have to lead to suffering. Suffering is largely a psychological experience that stems from fear, panic, and a loss of control. Pain, on the other hand, is a natural part of the labor process. With a comprehensive understanding of what's happening in your body, you can prevent suffering, and even feel empowered. Learning to manage your pain builds the confidence to navigate labor on your terms.

✦ **Even if you're planning an epidural, keep reading.** Most hospitals want your contractions in an established pattern, close together, lasting close to a minute, for a full hour, before you're admitted and eligible for pain medication. That's the 4-1-1 rule, and it often means many hours of real, intense contractions at home first. These techniques aren't a backup plan for people going unmedicated, they're what gets everyone through those early hours, whatever you choose later.

✦ THE 3 R'S: YOUR COPING FRAMEWORK

To prepare for and cope with labor pain, use the three R's: relaxation, rhythm, and ritual. This approach helps prevent feeling overwhelmed and guides you toward discovering your own coping style, the one that actually works for you.

Relaxation

- ✦ During early labor, and during or between contractions, focus on relaxation techniques to ease discomfort.
- ✦ Try passive relaxation, releasing tension and letting the body go limp, or active relaxation, like swaying and chanting.

Rhythm

- ✦ Use rhythm and repetitive motion to calm the body, such as a rhythmic rock or moan.

Ritual

- ✦ Repetitive rhythmic activities or motions with each contraction, planned or spontaneous.
- ✦ Planned rituals like quick, shallow breaths and attention-focusing may give way to more instinctual rituals as labor intensifies.

✦ **Dawn's Tip:** Don't wait until you're in labor to find out what works for you. Practice the 3 R's during pregnancy so your body already knows the pattern when it's needed.

OPTION 1

Natural Techniques for Pain Management

Hypnobirthing

- ✦ Combines relaxation techniques, visualization, breathing exercises, and affirmations to help the body reach its deepest state of relaxation, letting your muscles work more naturally and freely during labor.

Attention-Focusing

- ✦ Redirects your mind from labor pain to concentrate on a focal point or sensation, a person, object, sound, or spoken mantra.

Positions & Movements

- ✦ Free movement and varied labor positions increase comfort and can help you cope with pain better.
- ✦ Frequent movement of the pelvis may help baby find an optimal fit, ideally speeding up labor.

Hydrotherapy

- ✦ Warm water, in a bath or shower, eases labor pain, reduces stress hormones, increases oxytocin production, and can even progress labor.

TENS (Transcutaneous Electrical Nerve Stimulation)

- ✦ A battery-powered device delivers small pulses of electrical current through two electrodes. Most beneficial during prelabor or early labor for back pain.

Touch & Massage

- ✦ Aids relaxation and reduces labor pain through soft touch, like light body strokes and a soothing back rub, or firm touch, like rhythmic kneading of the legs or counter pressure.

✦ **Dawn's Tip:** Most of these techniques work best with practice and a support person who knows your preferences ahead of time. This is exactly what a doula is there for.

OPTION 2

Medical Pain Management

Systemic Analgesics *Injection or pill*

- ✦ Short-term pain-relieving medications entered into the bloodstream, affecting the entire system, such as morphine, Phenergan, and fentanyl.

Neuraxial Analgesia & Anesthesia *Epidural*

- ✦ A thin catheter inserted into the lumbar spine in the lower back delivers low doses of both narcotics and anesthetics. Causes partial to complete numbness from the waist down, eliminating contraction pain.

Inhalation Analgesia *Laughing gas*

- ✦ Intermittent inhalation of nitrous oxide through a mask, just before each contraction, for an instant, momentary reduction in labor pain.

✦ **Remember:** *There's no prize for doing it a certain way. The best pain management plan is the one that lets you feel supported, informed, and in control of your own decisions, whatever you end up choosing.*

Work with Dawn: Visit mydouladawn.com to book a free 15-minute call.