Nitrous Oxide in Labor

**USING NITROUS OXIDE DURING LABOR**
You will inhale nitrous oxide through the mask provided. You must hold your own mask, which allows you to decide when to use it and how much you need. By starting to inhale the gas mixture 30-45 seconds BEFORE your contraction, the gas will reach peak effect at about the same time your contraction reaches its peak, giving you the greatest relief. It is important that you exhale directly into the mask to protect hospital staff, your support person(s) and visitors from being exposed to the gas.

**HOW MUCH DOES IT HELP WITH LABOR PAIN?**
How well nitrous oxide works depends on the individual. For some women it “takes the edge off” the peak of contraction pain enough to allow them to cope better with labor. Some women report greater pain relief. Nitrous oxide reduces anxiety, which also helps women cope better with labor pain. Some women do not like the way nitrous oxide makes them feel and/or do not find it helpful enough – these women can choose to try other options. Other pain relief options are still available after using nitrous oxide.

**HOW WILL IT MAKE ME FEEL AND WHAT ARE THE SIDE EFFECTS?**
You might feel drowsy, lightheaded or a little silly while you’re using nitrous oxide. Some women have reported nausea after prolonged use. (There are additional medications that can be given to help alleviate nausea, if necessary.) It is possible to faint (pass out or lose consciousness) temporarily if you inhale too much gas – this is why it is important that you are the ONLY person holding the mask. When your body has received enough gas, your hand will naturally fall away from your face and you will no longer be inhaling the gas, which prevents you from fainting. Occasionally, some women experience restlessness or confusion. Most side effects go away quickly once you stop inhaling the gas.

**WILL IT AFFECT MY LABOR PROGRESSION?**
No. Nitrous oxide does not have any effect on your uterus or contractions and will not affect your labor progression.

**DID YOU KNOW?**
- Nitrous oxide is a colorless, odorless, tasteless gas used to decrease pain sensations. The Nitronox™ system is a blended mixture of 50 percent nitrous oxide and 50 percent oxygen that is inhaled through a mask.
- Nitrous oxide has been used in operating rooms, dental offices, and labor and delivery suites for many decades.
- Despite widespread use in the United Kingdom, Australia and Europe, usage during labor has not been available in the United States until very recently.

If you have additional questions please contact the MercyOne Birthing Unit at 515-358-3000.
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