

# Pain relief in labour: Epidurals and Remifentanil explained

Maternity - Obstetrics and Gynaecology [Patient information](#)

	Epidural	Remifentanil PCA
<b>What is it?</b>	<p>A fine plastic tube will be inserted between the bones in your back. This will be done with a needle. You will be given local anaesthetic to numb the area.</p> <p>Through this tube you will be given local anaesthetic and pain killer. This will numb the nerves below your waist. Doing this reduces the pain of labour/contractions. It might cause your legs to feel heavy.</p>	<p>A drip is inserted into a vein in your arm or hand. The drip is attached to an analgesia (PCA) pump. You will be in control of pressing the button on the pump. When you press it, a small dose of Remifentanil is pumped into your vein.</p> <p>This will make you feel less pain during labour. Remifentanil is a powerful morphine-type drug. It is used in anaesthetics. It has been recommended by NICE to help with labour pain relief since 2023.</p>
<b>How is it used?</b>	<p>To have an epidural you must be on Labour Ward. You must be in established labour. Please discuss this with your midwife.</p> <p>The epidural will give constant pain relief. You don't have to do anything. However, you can press a button to give an extra dose if needed.</p>	<p>To use Remifentanil you must be on Labour Ward. You must be in established labour. Please discuss this with your midwife.</p> <p>Press the button every time you have a contraction. Each dose of Remifentanil will wear off after a few minutes. You are the only person that should press the button.</p>

<p><b>What will happen?</b></p>	<p>An epidural provides the most effective pain relief. This is compared to all other labour pain relief.</p> <p>It takes around 20-30 minutes to put in. It will start working around 20-30 minutes after it is given. It can be 'topped up' for procedures such as a caesarean section. You will not need any extra injections.</p> <p>Women and birthing people are often able to sleep with an epidural. This is because it provides good pain relief. It does not make you drowsy. You may be able to walk around in the room. This is called a mobile epidural. Ask your anaesthetist if you would like to do this.</p>	<p>Remifentanyl is safe for women and birthing people who cannot have epidurals for medical reasons.</p> <p>Remifentanyl will start working within five minutes. It will make you feel relaxed and sleepy. This is because it is a sedative (a drug to make you feel calm).</p> <p>Remifentanyl can pass to your unborn baby, as with any medication. It can cause your baby to be drowsy and slow to breathe at birth. Remifentanyl is safe as it wears off very quickly.</p> <p>We will not need to monitor your baby unless there are other risks.</p>
---------------------------------	---	---

## Contact details

**Woodland ward (Labour ward)**

Telephone: **0300 019 8584**

To read this leaflet in a different language, please visit our website: [www.uhd.nhs.uk/visit/patient-information-leaflets](http://www.uhd.nhs.uk/visit/patient-information-leaflets) and use the language and accessibility function available along the top of the site.

To ask for this leaflet in larger print, please contact the patient experience team on **0300 019 8499** or email [patientexperienceteam@uhd.nhs.uk](mailto:patientexperienceteam@uhd.nhs.uk).

The Royal Bournemouth Hospital, Castle Lane East, Bournemouth, Dorset, BH7 7DW  
 Poole Hospital, Longfleet Road, Poole, Dorset, BH15 2JB

Author: **Caroline Fortescue** Date: **June 2025** Version: **One** Review date: **June 2028** Ref: **016/25**

w: [www.uhd.nhs.uk](http://www.uhd.nhs.uk) : [@uhdnhs.bsky.social](https://twitter.com/uhdnhs.bsky.social) : [@UHDTrust](https://www.facebook.com/UHDTrust) : [@uhd\\_nhs](https://www.instagram.com/uhd_nhs)