

Best Start in Life community session Q&A:

PREGNANCY

Q: What are the different types of pain relief and medication I can have during labour?

A: There are lots of effective ways to manage pain during childbirth, including:

TENS machine

Delivers small electrical currents through pads on your back. It's drug-free, you control it, and it may help in early labour, but is less effective in later stages.

Epidural

A local anaesthetic injected near your spine to numb pain. It can be very effective, especially in a difficult labour, but may slow labour and sometimes requires further intervention. It's not available everywhere and has some side effects.

Gas and air (Entonox)

A mix of oxygen and nitrous oxide breathed through a mask or mouthpiece. Works quickly, can take pain away completely, may cause light-headedness or sleepiness, but has no harmful effects for you or your baby.

Pethidine

An injection that helps you relax for a few hours. It's not suitable late in labour as it can affect the baby's breathing and feeding. It may have some side-effects.

Self-help techniques

Learning about labour, practicing relaxation and breathing, moving around, and trying different positions can help you feel more in control, though these may not work for everyone. Learning about labour and what is going to happen can help - ask your midwife what to expect and try antenatal classes to get more information.

Alternative methods

Some people try acupuncture, aromatherapy, or homeopathy. There's no strong evidence these work, but some find them helpful. Always discuss with your care team if you want to use these in hospital.

Water birth

This is where you give birth in a special pool kept at a comfortable temperature and can help you relax and move more easily. Pools are available in many hospitals and for home births.

Discuss your preferences with your midwife or doctor and include them in your birth plan. You can change your mind on the day.

Further information can be found here on the website: <https://www.nhs.uk/best-start-in-life/pregnancy/preparing-for-labour-and-birth/pain-relief-and-medication-during-labour/#self-help>

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Q: What will I learn/find out about in antenatal classes?

A: Antenatal classes give you practical information about labour, birth and early parenthood. They are free to attend and are often very sociable, making them a great way to meet other parents and build a support network. They usually start 8-10 weeks before your baby is due and you can select classes just for pregnant women, or classes that welcome a partner or friend. Some offer classes specifically for single mothers or teenagers.

Antenatal classes cover a range of labour and birth topics such as:

- **Diet** - how to stay healthy and have a good diet while you're pregnant
- **Exercise** - what types of exercise are good for keeping fit in pregnancy
- **Labour** - what to expect
- **Relaxation** - how to relax while you're pregnant and after you've had your baby
- **Delivery methods** - different birth methods and interventions
- **After the birth** - how to look after your newborn, and how you can stay healthy
- **Emotional wellbeing** - how you might feel during and after your pregnancy

The NHS antenatal classes are free. Ask your midwife, health visitor or GP for details.

Find out more here: <https://www.nhs.uk/best-start-in-life/pregnancy/preparing-for-labour-and-birth/antenatal-and-hypnobirthing-classes/#antenatal-classes>

Q: What can I do if I suffer from morning sickness?

A: Morning sickness is common in pregnancy, but there are ways to manage it:

- **Eat small meals often:** aim for 6 light meals a day instead of 3 large ones
- **Eat a healthy, balanced diet:** bland foods such as plain toast, dry bread, jacket potatoes, pasta or plain biscuits can help
- **Stay hydrated:** sip water regularly throughout the day
- **Try ginger:** some people find that ginger tea, ginger ale, crystallised ginger or ginger biscuits can ease nausea
- **Get plenty of rest!**
- **Other tips:** sucking ice cubes or wearing travel acupressure wristbands can help some people

It's worth remembering that there is no evidence that nausea and vomiting have a harmful effect on your baby but do talk to your midwife or doctor if you cannot keep food or drink down as you may need specialist treatment.

Find out more here: <https://www.nhs.uk/best-start-in-life/pregnancy/morning-sickness/#treatment-for-morning-sickness>

PREGNANCY

Q: What should I expect at my 10-week appointment, and why is it important for me to attend?

A: Your 10-week appointment is an important part of your pregnancy care. **It gives you the chance to talk about your options for pregnancy and birth** and ask any questions you may have.

At this appointment, you will be offered **screening tests** for infectious diseases and conditions such as Down's syndrome. You can also discuss the **Maternity Transformation Programme** and how it could benefit you.

Attending this appointment helps ensure you and your baby get the right care and support from the start and ensure you are booked in for your scans.

Find out more here: <https://www.nhs.uk/best-start-in-life/pregnancy/week-by-week-guide-to-pregnancy/1st-trimester/week-10/>

Q: What foods should I avoid during pregnancy, and what are the benefits of taking folic acid?

A: During pregnancy, some foods can increase the risk of harm to your baby, so it's best to avoid them. These include:

- **Certain cheeses:** such as mould-ripened soft cheeses (e.g. brie, camembert) and unpasteurised cheeses
- **Raw or undercooked meat:** to reduce the risk of infection
- **Foods high in salt:** eating too much salt can raise your blood pressure

You should also avoid raw fish, liver, and foods that may contain harmful bacteria. Always wash fruit and vegetables thoroughly.

Folic acid is essential in pregnancy. It helps prevent birth defects known as neural tube defects, including spina bifida. While folate (the natural form of folic acid) is found in foods like leafy greens, pulses, yeast and beef extracts, oranges, wheat, poultry and pork, you should take a daily folic acid supplement as advised, ideally from when you start trying for a baby.

Find out more here: <https://www.nhs.uk/best-start-in-life/pregnancy/healthy-eating-in-pregnancy/#which-foods-should-i-avoid>

<https://www.nhs.uk/best-start-in-life/pregnancy/vitamins-and-supplements-in-pregnancy/#folic-acid>

Conversation starters:

- “What have you heard about pain relief and medication options during labour?”
- “What are you most curious or unsure about when it comes to antenatal classes?”
- “What have you found helpful for managing morning sickness?”
- “What do you know about the 10-week appointment, and why do you think it's important?”
- “What have you heard about foods to avoid during pregnancy or the benefits of taking folic acid?”