

Demerol

The conventional narcotic most requested by women and administered by physicians is "Demerol". In spite of the well known placental transfer of the medication meperidine (1) [commonly known as "demerol" (2)] it is the most widely used intramuscular opioid for the relief of labor pain (3). When Demerol is administered during labor, it reaches its highest level in fetal tissues within two to three hours (4).

Opioids such as Demerol and morphine are ineffective. They simply do not relieve labor pain. The inadequacy of Demerol for pain relief in labor is well documented (5) (6) (7) but it is still in widespread use in the United States. Women who receive Demerol in labor report slight or no pain relief after 60 minutes (8). A full 97% of women complained of moderate to severe pain within two hours of receiving their injection of Demerol (9).

Neither Demerol or morphine reduce pain in labor, yet they do reduce anxiety and discomfort by heavily sedating a woman. Sometimes women fall asleep, only to be awakened by painful contractions. Demerol does produce the sensation of being "high" yet when receiving Demerol or morphine, 75% of women still ultimately requested an epidural (10).

Women receiving Demerol in labor complain of confusion and loss of control due to its sedative effects. Other adverse side effects reported include severe nausea and vomiting (11). One author states, "...it seems unethical and medically incorrect to meet the parturient's (a woman giving birth) request for analgesia by giving her heavy sedation." (12)

When Demerol is given, using one or two doses of 75-100 mg., a reduction of the number of accelerations found on the fetal heart rate monitor were noted (13). The use of this drug may affect the baby's heart rate.

Demerol has also been shown to lengthen the time spent in labor (14). The more doses of Demerol the woman receives, the more it prolongs her labor. Since this drug has no real pain relieving benefits, why would women want it? Perhaps they do not know of its adverse effects. Demerol is of little value in labor.