

CHAPTER 11: LABOR PAIN AND OPTIONS FOR PAIN RELIEF

Effectiveness of Pain Relief Options: What New Mothers Say

In the book, we share results from the nationwide *Listening to Mothers* survey (2006). The chart below summarizes the result from a Seattle-area survey from 2011. A total of 426 people answered the survey question. Their babies were eight to twenty-one months old at the time of the survey. (*Note:* The respondents were not a representative sample of the full birthing population in King County. Respondents were older, more likely to be married, higher education, more likely to be a first time parent, and more likely to have used a midwife versus an OB than the average parent. They're all heavier than average users of resources such as classes, doulas, and postpartum support.)

We asked, “How helpful were the following in making you more comfortable and relieving your pain?”

Options (from most effective to least effective*)	Number who used	Very helpful	Somewhat helpful	Average rating *
Epidural or spinal	51%	87%	7%	3.8
Breathing techniques	81%	47%	44%	3.4
Mental strategies (relaxation, etc.)	65%	46%	43%	3.3
Hands-on techniques (massage, etc.)	68%	44%	44%	3.3
Immersion in a tub or a pool	63%	53%	30%	3.3
Position changes and/or movement to relieve discomfort	86%	37%	54%	3.3
Application of hot or cold objects to your body	42%	26%	57%	3.1
Shower	28%	35%	45%	3.1
Changes to environment (e.g. dim lights, music)	40%	23%	54%	2.9
Use of large “birth balls” for support	55%	26%	49%	2.9
IV narcotics	17%	31%	36%	2.8
Nitrous oxide	4%	17%	6%	1.8
Sterile water injections for lower back pain	6%	16%	0%	1.8

* Average rating: if response was “poor” or “not helpful at all”, it was scored as 1, “fair” or “not very helpful” was scored as 2, “good” or “somewhat helpful” = 3, “excellent” or “very helpful” = 4.