



## **Nitrous Oxide – an option for pain relief in labour.**

Nitrous oxide blended with oxygen, also known as laughing gas is a commonly used medical gas. It is most often used during dental procedures, in childbirth and in ambulances for painful injuries such as broken bones before a patient can get to hospital. It is also used in operating rooms to help a patient relax before being put to sleep.

The Hamilton Midwives is pleased to offer our clients a blend of nitrous oxide and oxygen called Alnox which can be inhaled during labour. Alnox is breathed in during contractions to provide pain relief and decrease anxiety by working in the same way as morphine and the body's own pain killers called endorphins. Alnox causes mild sedation (sleepiness), a feeling of wellbeing, and decreases the perception of pain.

**This medication is available to our clients planning home birth and to people labouring for the first time who wish to stay home as long as possible before going to hospital for their birth. It can only be used when the midwife is with you.** It may also be offered to clients in the office who find vaginal exams difficult to tolerate or for those having an IUD inserted. It is also used during stitching after birth.

### **Benefits of Nitrous use in labour:**

- Safe for birthing person and baby.
- The gas delivery system is held and administered by the person in labour, they are in full control of how much gas they inhale.
- If a client does not like the feeling of the gas, they just take a few deep breaths of plain air and the effect of the nitrous goes away.
- There is no sedative effect on baby so they are born alert and can follow all of their natural instincts.
- There is no effect on breastfeeding.
- The fear and anxiety which is troublesome for many laboring people is decreased with this medication.
- The gas encourages the body to release its own painkillers (endorphins).
- Most clients report less pain when using the gas.
- Nitrous does not affect the way the body works to labour and birth the baby.

### **Risks of Nitrous use in labour:**

- Nausea, vomiting, and/or dizziness can occur. Usually once the client gets used to using the gas after several contractions these effects go away.
- Some clients may find the sensations associated with the gas unpleasant. Some people describe a feeling of grogginess or a foggy head.
- Some clients do not feel that the medication is effective.
- There is only 1 gas delivery system in the practice so we cannot guarantee that it will be available when you are in labour.

