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## 5 Things Moms Don't Expect from the Epidural

by **Judy Koutsky**

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Stocksy



Labor and delivery can be full of unknowns, so we asked Dr. Alyssa Dweck, an OBGYN at the Mount Kisco Medical Group in Westchester County, New York and the medical adviser for [HealthyMamaBrand.com](https://www.healthy-mama.com), what she's noticed often surprises moms about having an [epidural](#) — the most common procedure used in the birthing process to help with pain management:

**Labor Hurts...A Lot!** Women know birthing a baby isn't a walk in the park, but many aren't aware of just how painful labor actually is. Often they may go into the delivery room thinking they will not use pain medication, but they're surprised at just how much it hurts! The best idea, suggests Dr. Dweck, is to keep an open mind about your [birth plan](#). If you're hoping for a natural birth, try a variety of non-medical pain management techniques (like breathing exercises and various [birthing positions](#)). But don't feel bad if you end up needing an epidural.

**Quick Relief:** When you're in a lot of pain, you want relief — now! Women in labor are often surprised at how quickly they feel relief after having an epidural. Pain can begin subsiding in as quickly as 15 minutes after the first hit of medication.

**It's Not a Matter of Dilation:** It's a misconception that you have to be fully dilated to have an epidural. Epidurals can be given to women who are minimally dilated up through those who are fully dilated. Bottom line: If you're in pain, you can ask for an epidural.

**An Epidural Does Not Mean C-Section:** Some women fear that an epidural increases their risk of having a [C-section](#). Not so, says Dr. Dweck: Many women are (pleasantly) surprised to hear that this is not the case.

**Tattoo Controversy:** Moms who are inked are typically surprised to find out that there's been controversy about [epidural placement in women with a lower back tattoo](#). There hasn't been enough research done on this topic, says Dr. Dweck, but there are some theoretical negative consequences. If you do have a lower back tattoo, Dr. Dweck advises finding an experienced and well-trained anesthesiologist to perform the epidural, and ideally to find a spot on the back where there is no ink.

While epidurals are effective pain relief, they do, of course, have downsides. As the drug kicks in, some women experience fever, headaches or a drop in blood pressure. Some research has shown that epidurals can make labor last longer

and can make it harder for babies to initially latch. So talk to your health care practitioner about the benefits and risks to decide what's best for you.

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**Written by Judy Koutsky**

Judy Koutsky is the former Editorial Director of KIWI magazine, a green parenting publication. She was also Executive Editor of Parenting.com, AOL Parent and BabyTalk.com. Her work has appeared in over 30 publications. Follow her on twitter [@JudyKoutsky](#).

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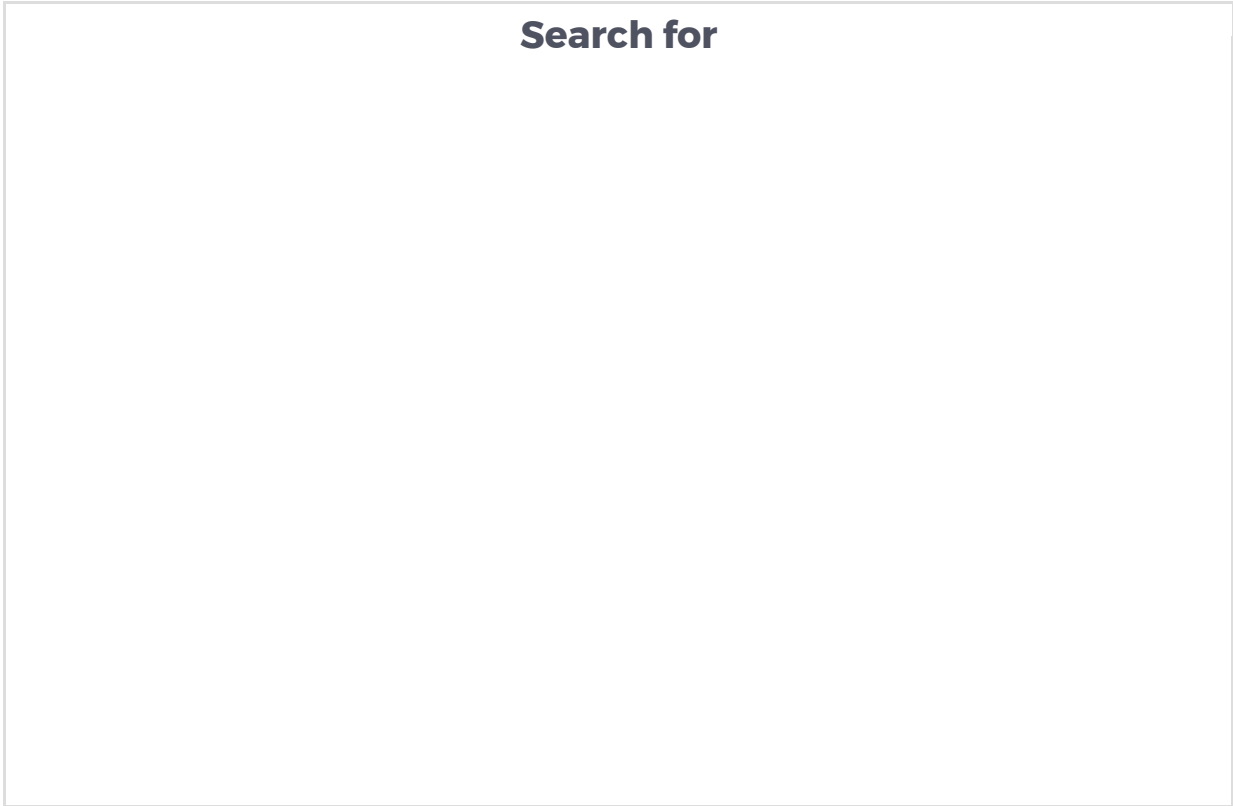
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