

Script – Print – The bond between mother and baby

A [study](#) published in the Journal of Clinical Anesthesia says epidurals are effective in increasing the maternal/infant bond between mother and baby. And some of the findings point towards a decreased risk of postpartum depression as well in those in the mothers who received epidurals.

According to the study, there were 30% more complaints about the initial bonding between mother and baby from women who did *not* have an epidural, compared to those who did.

“I was not surprised by the results of this study,” says Dr. Casey Sager, an OB/GYN for OSF HealthCare. “I think it was a small study that had a good conclusion as far as the positivity of an epidural and how it can increase the maternal/infant ability to bond after the delivery because the patient is more comfortable. They can focus on the baby instead of the discomfort or pain that they experienced during labor.”

According to the American Society of Anesthesiologists, an epidural provides anesthesia that creates a numbness from the belly area to the upper legs. It allows the mother to be awake throughout labor, as well as to feel pressure. The ability to feel labor pressure which enables pushing when it’s time to give birth. It can take about 15 minutes for the pain medication to work, and the amount of medication can be increased or decreased as needed.

“The mother and her care team participate together to decide timing of the epidural and whether it's needed or warranted at all, but most of the time, the patient has a lot of autonomy in that decision,” says Dr. Sager.

Dr. Sager says epidurals can help beyond the actual labor and delivery.

“I think that mom can focus on the emotions of welcoming the baby into the world instead of the pain that she just endured and that she might still be enduring after delivery because it isn't as simple as the baby is out and everything is good,” says Dr. Sager. “There are still placenta and repairs and other things that happen that can be distracting. Whereas if the mother is comfortable, she can focus on baby and bonding and skin to skin time versus other things that are happening.”

Dr. Sager says studies like this are important to show that the benefits are not necessarily limited to decreased pain during labor and delivery, but afterwards as well in the postpartum period. The study indicated that epidural analgesia can also help lower risk for post-partum depression, too.

An epidural, like any procedure, has potential side effects. They can include a spinal headache, an itching reaction to the medications, nausea, and possible hypertension, which can all be treated with medication.

Dr. Sager says epidurals are not for everyone.

“Some feel like they can do it without medication,” she says. “Whatever choice is best for the patient is supported by the team as well.”

For more information on gynecology services, visit [OSF HealthCare](#).