

Using TENS in labour



Transcutaneous Electrical Nerve Stimulation (TENS) is a portable and non-invasive form of pain relief. It works externally so does not affect either the baby or the mother's chemical balance. It allows you to be mobile and because you control it completely, it can be stopped at anytime if you feel it is not working for you.

Self adhesive pads are placed on your back, and connected by wires to a small battery-powered unit. Small electrical pulses are then transmitted to the body. TENS can be used at home during the early stages of labour and is ideal for use with homebirths.

How does TENS work?

When we experience pain, messages are sent along the nerves to the brain and then pain is felt. The TENS electrodes are positioned over the nerve pathways which transmit pain messages from the uterus and cervix during labour.

The TENS unit produces tiny electrical impulses which are sent through the skin to the nerves. The electrical stimulation of the nerves blocks those messages from reaching the brain. The brain then registers the tingling sensation produced by the TENS unit rather than the pain. The signals can be increased in frequency and intensity as contractions become stronger.

TENS also stimulates the body's production of endorphins (natural pain relieving hormones). It takes about an hour for your body to start to respond to TENS, so start using TENS early on in labour on a low setting it can then be turned up as labour progresses or as your body gets used to the sensation of the TENS. TENS can be used after 37 weeks gestation.

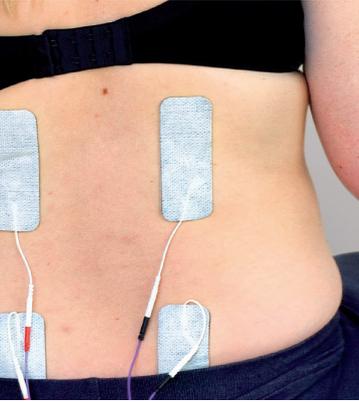
Please do not use TENS if you have a cardiac pacemaker.

Other pain relief options can still be used if TENS does not provide adequate pain relief e.g. entonox and pethidine but would need to be removed if using an epidural or water. If getting in the bath in the early stages of labour, apply TENS after the bath.

TENS is more effective if used in combination with other coping strategies such as relaxation, positioning and massage.

How to use the TENS unit

Ensure back is dry and free from oils, the pads are for one patient use but can be used several times if using the unit prior to labour.



Position of the pads

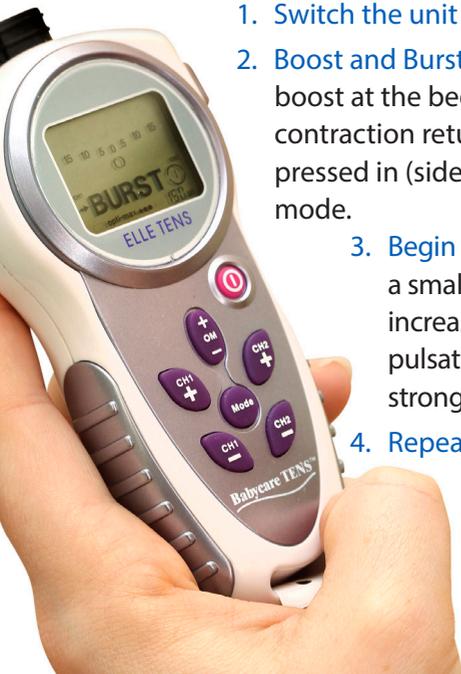
Sit upright, have an imaginary line from the navel to the centre of the spine.

Position the top two pads approximately 4cm either side of the spine and 4-5cm above the imaginary navel line (just below the bra line).

Position the bottom two pads approximately 4cm either side of the spine and 4-5cm below the imaginary navel line (over the sacral dimple area).

Position of the electrodes

Plug two wires in to the top of unit (doesn't matter which side). Connect the top two electrodes with the lead to left side of unit (CH1) and the bottom two to the right side of unit (CH2) – there is a red and black connector on each lead, it doesn't matter which side they are connected to as long as a black and red connector from the same lead are attached to the top two electrodes and the same to the bottom two.



1. Switch the unit on with the pink on/off button.
2. **Boost and Burst mode.** Start in burst mode and then press boost at the beginning of a contraction. At the end of a contraction return to burst. Ensure the boost button is not pressed in (side of unit). The TENS will always start in the burst1 mode.
3. **Begin by pressing the CH1 + key.** Each time you press a small 'half moon' shape will appear on the screen increasing in size as the intensity is increased. A pulsating sensation will be felt, increase slowly until at a strong but comfortable level.
4. Repeat with the CH2 + key

MODE button

Mode 1 – can be used in burst and boost (primarily for early labour).

Mode 2 – can be used in burst and boost (to use when labour advances and contractions become more frequent). It can be used according to preference and not necessarily the stage of labour.

Optimax button

There are five optimax levels indicated by dots on the bottom of screen. The machine always starts and resets at 3. The Optimax button increases or reduces the intensity of the pulses. It can be used to give an extra surge of power in the final stages of labour.

When you are finished with the TENS machine

Doncaster Women's Hospital - please return to maternity reception and sign the returns book.

Bassetlaw Hospital - please return to staff on labour ward prior to discharge.

To hire a TENS unit please contact the Community Office on tel: 01302 642793. Training on fitting and usage will be given on collection.

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

The team are available to help with any concerns/complaints you may have about your experience at the Trust. Their office is in the Main Foyer (Gate 4) of Doncaster Royal Infirmary. Contact can be made either in person, by telephone or email.

The contact details are:

Telephone: 01302 642764 or 0800 028 8059

Email: dbth.pals.dbh@nhs.net