Physiotherapy

The Use of TENS in Labour

How it works
- Stimulation blocks pain fibres carrying pain messages to the brain using electrodes positioned over the sensory nerves supplying the painful area
- Stimulates release of natural painkilling substances (endorphins)
- Increases pain threshold
- Causes increased feeling of wellbeing

When to use?
- As soon as contractions are strong
- Don’t wait till they are unbearable
- Lag time for pain-relieving effect

Advantages
- The machine can be turned off for clinical evaluation of labour
- It allows pain to be a diagnostic tool
- There is no affect on the mother’s consciousness
- It does not effect your baby
- It allows active involvement in labour – no restriction on positioning
- It is non-invasive
- The woman is in control
- There may be decreased need for additional analgesia

Disadvantages
- The machine may interfere with foetal heart monitoring – turn machine off
- Skin irritation may occur – need to move electrode placement 3-4 hourly
- Have to remove electrodes to shower – mark electrode positions with waterproof marker

Contraindications
- Pacemaker
- Reduced skin sensation
- Electrode placement over the abdominal wall
- Wet areas
Electrode placement & settings
The correct position is one where the sensation of TENS blends with, and seems to overpower the sensation of the contraction. Mark these with a waterproof marker

1st stage –
- Pain receptors are activated by uterine contractions and cervix dilatation
- T10 – L1: Referred to abdomen and back
  Last rib and below

2nd stage –
- Pain related to distension and stretching of birth canal, pelvic floor and perineum,
- S2 – S4: Region above buttock cheek

- Position electrodes adjacent to but not over spine
- Separate them to prevent cross-current interference
- Ensure good gel coverage, tape in position
- Can use dry hotpacks on top of electrodes

What settings?
- Frequency/Rate: 50 – 100Hz
- Width: 100ms
- Intensity: comfortable
- Wave form: Whichever is more comfortable
  Lower the intensity if changing from one to another

NB: Please read the user manual for the TENS unit you hire to ensure you use the correct settings for your particular machine

Physiotherapist ________________________________ Signature ________________________________ Date ___/___/____
(Name & Designation)

If you have any concerns with this advice or exercises, please contact your physiotherapist