

TENS (Trans-Electrical Nerve Stimulation) in Labour

What is a TENS

- TENS (Trans-Electrical Nerve Stimulation) is a low risk, non-invasive pain relief option that can be considered for labour.
- A TENS machine is a small hand held battery operated electronic device.
- The machine sends a controlled electrical current into the pads. The pads are placed on the users skin. This creates a tingling sensation.
- There is not much evidence on the effectiveness of TENS machines in labour for pain management. However, a Cochrane review found some women who used it in labour said they would use again in the future for their next delivery¹

Advantages

- Non- invasive
- Low risk
- Does not effect baby
- Drug free
- Allows the woman to be in control
- Can be turned on and off as required during labour
- Does not restrict positions or position changes
- May delay need for other pain management options

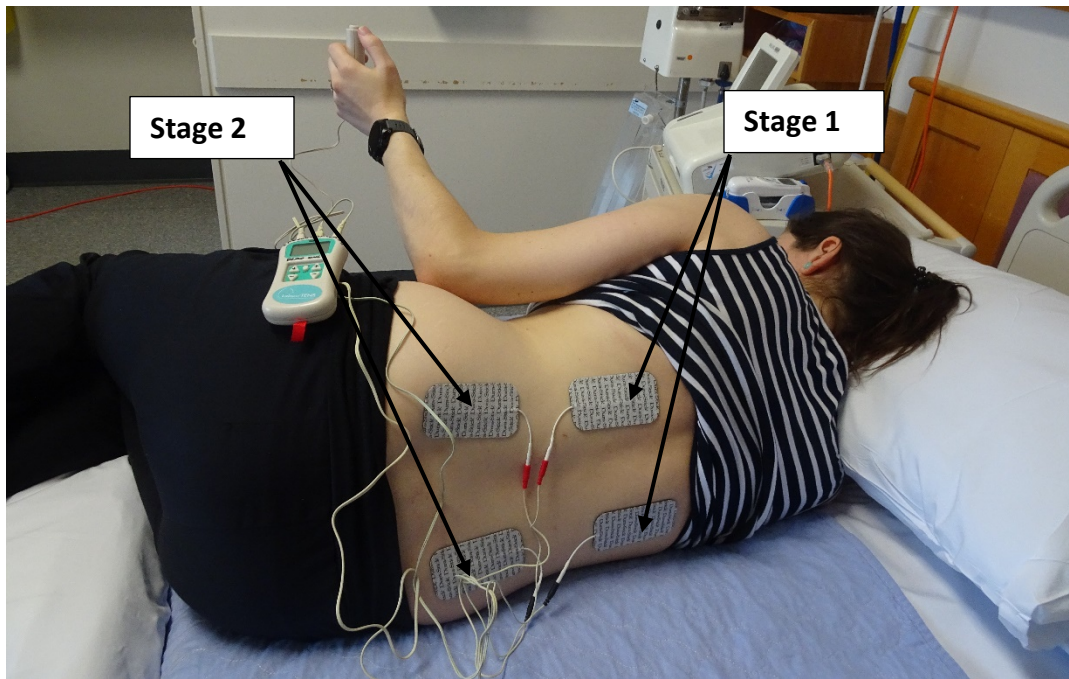
Risks and disadvantages

- Skin irritation or burn may occur where the pads are placed- monitor, change pad placement 3-4 hourly and cease treatment if irritation becomes an issue
- TENS cannot be used in the shower, bath or around wet surfaces- remove when doing this mark spots with a waterproof texta to return TENS once able
- TENS may interfere with baby heart monitoring- turn off machine and/or take it off if monitoring required

How to use TENS in Labour

- A TENS machine is made up of a hand held control device attached to 4 flat adhesive pads by sealed wires
- There are dials that the user can control the frequency and strength of sensation
- Normally two channels each with two pads attached

- The machine should be switched off and pads are placed on users clean dry skin
- Start on the lowest level and bring it up slowly to the level that suits your need
- When finished, switch machine off before removing pads
- For assistance in managing pain during labour the pads can be positioned on your mid back (stage 1) and/or low back (stage 2)
- They can be used as a single pair or both pairs can be used together dependent on your need, where you are feeling your pain and what point of labour you are in
- Maternity specific TENS machine options have a boost button that can be pushed at the peak of a contraction
- Please see picture for recommended pad placement



Example setting suggestions

- Frequency 50-100hz
- Width 100ms
- Intensity- comfortable

When to use TENS

- A TENS machine can be used from the beginning of your labour
- Don't wait until pain unbearable

Contraindications/ When TENS should NOT be used

- Before you go into labour
- If you are around or in water
- If you have a cardiac pace maker, internal defibrillator or heart rhythm issue
- If you have altered sensation in the area the pad is being placed
- Over malignant tissue
- Over open wounds
- Over the neck, heart or eyes or on top of reproductive organs
- If the user is unconscious or has an impaired mental status

Note:

- If you intend to use a TENS machine in your labour please ensure you read the user manual for safe and correct set up, warnings and use for the machine you plan to use
- For further information about how to set up and use your machine correctly please talk to your health professional

ⁱ Dowswell et al, 2009, 'Transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation (TENS) for pain relief in labour', Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews, Issue 2. Art. No. CD007214. DOI: 10.1002/14651858.CD007214.pub2.