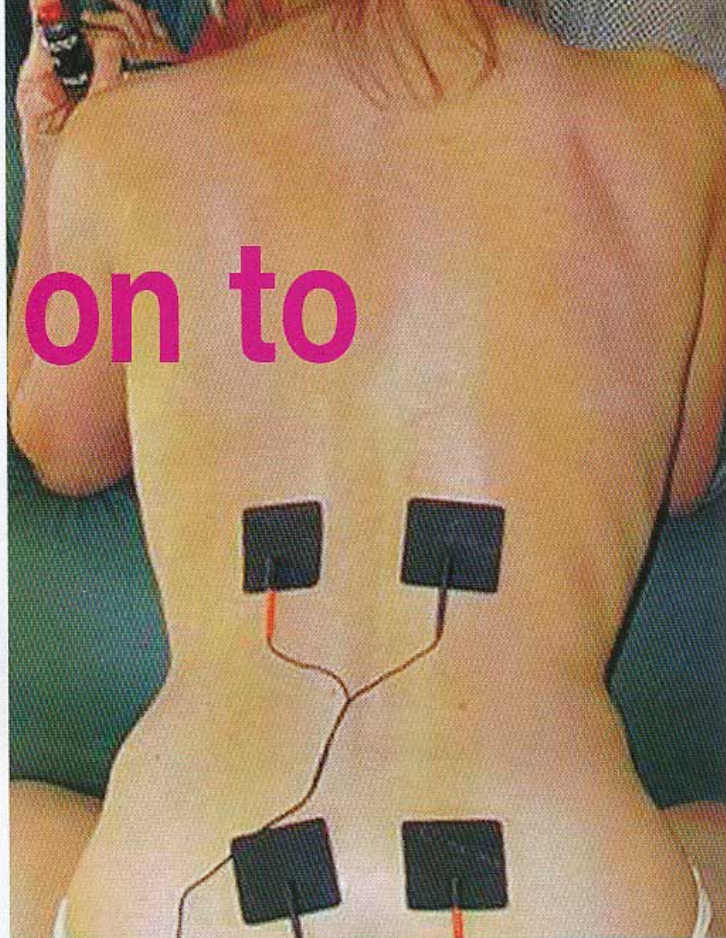


Switched on to TENS

THE INS AND OUTS OF TRANSCUTANEOUS ELECTRICAL NERVE STIMULATION (TENS) PAIN RELIEF



Treatment with TENS consists of attaching pads to your back. A low voltage electric current is passed across these pads and this stimulates your body to produce its own natural pain-relieving substances. It takes about 30 minutes before an effect is felt. The pain relief achieved is usually assessed as moderate, and is sometimes inconsistent. For some women it is of considerable value. As labour progresses the intensity of the electrical stimulation can be increased to cope with the increased pain of contractions, but frequently stronger pain relief may be required.

IS IT SAFE?

TENS is non-invasive and has few side effects when compared with drug therapy. The most

Did you know?

The non-invasive form of pain relief is completely controlled by YOU, the labouring mother.

common complaint is an allergic-type skin reaction (about 2% of patients) and this is almost always due to the material of the electrodes, the conductive gel or the tape used to hold the electrodes in place.

WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

TENS units consist of a small machine with controls (about the size of a cell phone), connected by wires to electrode pads placed appropriately to alleviate various types of pain. Some units are battery-operated and

small enough to carry in the hand or in a pocket.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

Most TENS units operate in two modes, a burst or pulse mode for chronic or low-level pain, and a constant mode for acute, short-lived pain (such as a labour contraction). When turned on, the TENS unit delivers a tingly, buzzing sensation to the area under the electrodes. It is thought that this sensation works in two ways to alleviate labour pain: it causes your body to release natural pain killers called endorphins, and it acts as a gateway, blocking deeper pain messages from travelling to your brain.

TENS will not completely eradicate labour pain but can lessen the pain, making it easier to tolerate

DOES IT WORK?

TENS will not completely eradicate labour pain in the way that an epidural does. Like water therapy, relaxation and breathing techniques and medicated pain relief, TENS can lessen the pain and make it easier to tolerate. Used in combination with other methods, it is even more likely to help. TENS can be helpful to get through the early labour until the point when you may or may not consider having an epidural.