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good advice

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to all your
burning
questions

Q My baby is teething, and he's really hurting. I heard that topical teething medicines actually harden your baby's gums and make teething more painful. Is that true, and are there ways that I can make my baby more comfortable?

A Teething usually begins when a baby is between 6 and 9 months old, and most babies have all of their primary or "baby" teeth by 3 years of age. And although most babies show only mild symptoms with teething such as slight fussiness, low-grade fever or drooling, some babies seem to suffer more.

While many parents feel that over-the-counter topical medicines like benzocaine (Orajel) help, others feel that they don't or even make their babies crankier (perhaps due to the unfamiliar sensation of numbness). Like most medicines, though, teething medicines have potential side effects, so talk to your pediatrician before giving your baby any medication.

Some remedies that you can safely try at home: Use a clean finger or cool washcloth to gently massage your baby's gums (hint—the bottom center teeth are usually the first to cut through) or offer teething rings or a cool spoon for your baby to chew on. It shouldn't take long to figure out what helps your baby most. More importantly, teething is harmless and it will end soon!

—Chris Funes, M.D., pediatrician

Q Needles really scare me, so an epidural is out of the question. Are there any needle-less ways that I can get relief from labor pain?

A There are many non-needle alternatives to an epidural. One of the most effective is water—either a shower or bath, depending on what's available where you'll be giving birth. Many women who've used water immersion during labor have found that the soothing and calming effect of water allowed them to feel more relaxed, even when their pain persisted. Also, consider hiring a doula, walking around as much as possible during labor, using a TENS device or attending a hypnosis course as part of your childbirth education class. Although hypnosis requires many hours of dedicated preparation, this approach often results in a satisfying reduction of labor pain.

—William Camann, M.D.,
obstetric anesthesiologist
and co-author of *Easy Labor:
Every Woman's Guide to
Choosing Less Pain and
More Joy During Childbirth*