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PRE-LABOR PREP

BREATHING PATTERNS

Baby, Body, Breath
FOR CHILDBIRTH
EBOOK

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Medical disclaimer: This material is for educational and informational purposes only and may not be construed as medical advice. The information is not intended to replace medical advice offered by your medical team.

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Breathing

IS A VIABLE COPING STRATEGY

When we feel fear, tension, and pain, the breath may become shallow, fast, and irregular. To find calm, relaxation and focus on yourself, bring attention to your breath. The power of breath is within your own ability to focus on and channel. Breath is something that is always with you. Connect to your breath to provide a focus and an anchor and a relaxed and ready nervous system to reduce the pain experience.

Breath is a powerful tool to utilize during labor. Our breath also gives clues to tell us where we are holding. Check in with your breath. The breath is the portal through the contractions.

Practice these breathing techniques to develop more calm and space inside yourself so if your labor experience becomes intense you can remain steady. Breathing well can help you transition from overwhelm to ease.



Tuning into your body and practicing breathing techniques prior to labor will help create the pathways needed to prepare your mind-body connection for the task that awaits you.

In the following pages, I'll provide different breathing techniques, how to utilize them, and different positions as you move your way through the stages of labor.

BREATHING PATTERNS AND TECHNIQUES



Practice the following breathing techniques prior to labor to become familiar with the patterns that will allow you to connect with your body, mind & breath.

☉ CALM BREATHING

- Take a breath in through the nose and breathe out slowly and gently through the nose or mouth.
- Drop your shoulders, relax your jaw, and let go of any tension.
- If you have a stuffy nose due to pregnancy, breathe in and out through the mouth while focusing on the breathing out.
- When practicing, allow your exhale to be a little longer than your inhale.

☉ FOCUSED BREATHING

- Practice breathing during a deep stretch or holding an ice cube in your hand. The exhale becomes the release.

☉ SOUNDING BREATHS

- Practice a low hum, sing, chant, sigh out loud and notice how you feel.

Note: Take a calm breath at the beginning and end of each contraction to let go of any held tension and to stay centered and present.



BREATHING PATTERNS AND TECHNIQUES



⊙ PELVIC FLOOR RELEASE

- Place one hand on your chest and another on your belly.
- As you inhale, become aware of the pelvic floor muscles lengthening and releasing during the breath in.
- As you breathe out slowly and gently, your pelvic floor returns to its resting state.
- Practice nightly for a few minutes before you go to sleep as you drift off comfortable and safe in bed.
- Associate the release with a time and place where it is safe to let go.

⊙ DIAPHRAGMATIC OR BELLY BREATHING

- Slow, controlled abdominal breathing. Breathe to your center and connect with your baby. Focus on the back of the diaphragm where you have space.

⊙ COUNTING BREATHS

- Breathe in for a count of 4, breathe out for a count of 6

SCRIPTING



Creating a script to help produce a relaxed state during labor can help calm your entire body. Scripting can help focus the mind and bring awareness to your breath and body.

Develop your script with your birth team or labor support person to practice ahead of time and use during labor.

VISUALIZATION



Develop strategies ahead of time to deal with the pain, fear and tension in labor to help stay calm, relaxed and patient, during contractions. Nurture your self trust and inner wisdom.

Visualize at night with your breath. Focus on belly breaths, pelvic floor release breaths and longer exhales. Focus on the image in the evening while practicing your calm breathing.

While practicing your breathing techniques, you'll want to visualize in your mind a place of relaxation and peace. Having an actual photograph or picture of a peaceful place can also help to bring about the visualization. Positive visualizations especially of loved ones and trusted friends.

🌀 EXAMPLES OF VISUALIZATION

- My cervix is softening, opening, and stretching
- My baby is moving down and out
- The baby is coming
- I am safe and loved
- You are sitting at the waters edge. A wave breaks over you and rolls in and up the shore, turns around and retreats back down and out.
- See a lake, an ocean or a swimming pool. Imagine being immersed in water.



IT'S TIME TO PLAN

⊙ CREATE YOUR BIRTH PREFERENCES

- Plan ahead what you want to be told during labor?
- What images or scripts do you want to see or hear during labor and birth?
- Write or draw big pictures on flashcards to be easily accessible during labor.

⊙ SHARE YOUR IMAGES, SCRIPTS VISUALIZATIONS AND AFFIRMATIONS WITH YOUR BIRTH TEAM

⊙ PRACTICE YOUR VISUALIZATIONS AND BREATHING TECHNIQUES NIGHTLY

In pre labor and very early labor, rest, hydrate and nourish yourself. Use distraction activities until the contractions are intense enough that you can no longer walk or talk through them without pausing and focusing on your breath. Use calm breathing for as long as you find it helpful. Add a labor ritual if you become tense and can no longer relax during contractions.



FIRST STAGE OF LABOR-
LATENT OR EARLY PHASE

SUPPORT BABY'S DESCENT & IDEAL POSITION

ACTIVITIES

- Walk/climb stairs
- Hip circles / figure 8's
- Slow dance, Belly dance
- 'Scrub the floor'
- Rocking, Pelvic Rocking
- 'Stomp, stomp, squat'

POSITIONS

- Stand and lean forward.
- Sit on toilet
- Upright sitting, backwards sitting
- Hands and Knees
- Sit with knees apart
- Lunge
- Kneel over something
- Side lying (Rest)



FIRST STAGE OF LABOR-
ACTIVE PHASE

BREATHING AND VOCALIZATIONS



- At the beginning and end of each contraction take a slow, deep breath
- Begin calm breathing when contractions are intense enough that you can no longer walk or talk through them without pausing
- Use calm breathing for as long as you find it helpful. Switch to another pattern if you become tense and can no longer relax during contractions
- As the contraction begins, sigh as you breathe out and release any tension
- Focus your attention. Take a breath, and then breathe out, slowly softly, and gently letting out a sigh if you like
- Inhale, then breathe out slowly, gently, and softly letting your body relax and release any tension
- You can sigh, hum, sing to baby, lullaby, chant, count, or just make a low sound during your exhale

During this phase of labor, it may take 5-7 breaths to move through a contraction. Focus on your breath, an image, a script, a phrase, counting or positive visualizations especially of loved ones and trusted friends.



FIRST STAGE OF LABOR-
ACTIVE PHASE

SUPPORT BABY'S ROTATIONS & IDEAL POSITIONING



MOVEMENT

- Sit to stand
- All fours to high kneel
- Walk and lean or walk and squat
- 'Dip the hip'
- Walk, sway, slow-dance with your support person
- Tap or stroke yourself, partner, or another object
- Close your eyes and become still and relaxed

POSITIONS

- Stand, lean (in the shower)
- Sit on a ball (in the shower or tub)
- Supported squat
- Lunge
- Stand and lean
- Hands and knees / High kneel
- Lean over back of bed or over a physio ball
- Side lie with a peanut ball between legs (change positions)



FIRST STAGE OF LABOR-
ACTIVE PHASE

BREATHING AND VOCALIZATIONS



- A steady breathing rhythm can help calm and relax you, especially if you release tension on the breath out. You always have control of your breath. Take an easy breath in, a longer breath out.
- Breathe through a contraction like breathing through a stretch in yoga. As you exhale you can “stretch” a bit more. Visualize the cervix stretching around the baby's head.
- Breath in through your nose, out through your mouth. Take one contraction at a time. One breath at a time – It becomes a process of elimination and it's one less contraction to get through.
- Imagine that you are one contraction closer to meeting your baby.

Try different variations of breath and vocalizations to see what's right for you. Focus on the exhalation.

BREATHING VARIATIONS TO TRY



🌀 CALM BREATH

- When the contraction begins, bring your attention to your breath.
- Let out a sigh and release any tension in your jaw, shoulders, or pelvis.
- Take a breath in through your nose, if you can, and breathe out through your mouth letting the sound out with a sigh.
- As you breathe out, relax and release tension.
- As the contraction ends, let it go.

FIRST STAGE OF LABOR- ACTIVE PHASE

☯ FOCUSED BREATH

- When the contraction begins, focus your attention.
- Take a quick breath in and a short breath out just loud enough to be heard.
- Imagine that you're climbing a hill. Quick breath in. Short breath out.
- As the contraction begins to come down, slow down your breathing allowing the breath out to become longer and easeful.
- If you become lightheaded or feel like you are going to hyperventilate, slow down your breaths and try to relax your shoulders and body, releasing any tension in your body.

☯ COUNTING BREATHS

- Inhale for the count of 4. Exhale for the count of 4

Try to stay on top of your breathing as the wave of the contraction begins to reach the top. If you lose yourself. Pause and catch your breath and find your rhythm again.

Try to harness your breath to the contraction. As the contraction wave breaks and it starts to come down focus on your exhalations and letting go, letting go, letting go.



FIRST STAGE OF LABOR- VERY ACTIVE/TRANSITION PHASE

During this exciting phase of labor, the baby is descending, rotating and getting into an ideal position to begin to birth. The contractions may become significantly longer and stronger. Different positions may help the baby rotate.

ACTIVITIES TO HELP DESCENT AND ROTATION



⊙ ACTIVITIES (ADD A RHYTHM)

- Kneel and lean over back of bed
- Stand and forward lean (in the shower)
- Sit to stand (in the shower)
- All fours to high kneel, Kneel on one knee
- Stand to squat / hanging squat / supported squat
- Tread or march on the spot
- Standing or leaning onto the side of the hospital bed/counter/railing while rocking or side swaying and stepping or marching.

⊙ BREATHING AND VOCALIZATIONS

- Find a breathing pattern that focuses, calms, and relaxes you. Find your own comfortable rhythm. It should not cause you to feel short of breath, dizzy, or lightheaded.
- Take a breath and focus on
 - Chanting, moaning, humming, singing or counting.
 - A deep breath in through the nose, with a low vocalization on the exhale.
 - Focused breath work: Inhale for the count of 4 and then exhale for the count of 4.
- We often release a strong emotion or physical sensation through sound or a vocal release. Crying is a vocal release of emotions. Our shoulders and throats relax as tears are shed. A low moan helps reduce tension in the jaw and throat which also reduces tension in the pelvis. When you breathe in – exhale with a low sound.

**Positive visualizations especially of loved ones
and trusted friends.**

SECOND STAGE OF LABOR- THE BIRTHING STAGE

PASSIVE / RESTING PHASE



Passive / Resting 2nd Stage is 10cm to visible baby hair.

Laboring down, so not pushing. Letting the baby find that place where it is putting pressure on the pelvic floor and allowing it to get to a +1 or +2 station where you will have the urge to push.

Be patient. Center yourself. Rest and wait for the urge to push.

Remind your providers of your birth preferences around pushing, such as the kind of pushing efforts and positions that you'd like to use, and communicate your feelings about an episiotomy.

🌀 ACTIVITIES

- Move and change positions to support the baby into the ideal birthing position.
- Nap or take a restorative rest.
- Get into water if possible. Water softens the perineum; shower, tub, warm compress.
- Hydrate and replenish yourself.

🌀 POSITIONS

- Side-lying
- Hands and knees, kneel over the back of the bed
- Hanging squat, standing squat, supported squat, squat up on toes
- Sit on the toilet or birth stool
- Stand and walk during contractions if descent is slow

SECOND STAGE OF LABOR- THE BIRTHING STAGE

ACTIVE / EXPULSION PHASE



The baby is descending and putting pressure on the cervix and going through the cervix and putting pressure on the pelvic floor.

Active / Expulsive 2nd Stage is when baby's head is on the perineum.

☉ ACTIVE/ PARTICIPATORY PUSHING

- As the contraction begins, focus your attention and breathe normally as you wait for the contraction to build
- Take in a breath and bear down at peak of the contraction for 4-7 seconds at a time. While bearing down, either hold your breath, exhale or let it out with a moan, groan or grunt.

☉ DIRECTED PUSHING

Your labor team is directing you. This technique may be used if you have an epidural, since the urge to push isn't always clear or felt

- The contraction begins
- Focus. Breathe in and out a couple of times
- Take a breath in and hold it (keep your throat soft) while you bear down for the count of 7-10, let out your breath. Take a few quick breaths in and out and repeat, holding and doing a "proper" strain.
- Repeat until contraction ends
- If you feel like someone else's count up to 10 is too long, ask for them to count to 5, 6 or 7
- Take a full relaxation breath releasing any tension in the body

SECOND STAGE OF LABOR-
THE BIRTHING STAGE

ACTIVE PHASE CONTINUED



☉ SPONTANEOUS PUSHING

- Bear down and push when you feel the urge.
- Breathe out with the urge with with a low moan or groan or gently hold your breath followed by a grunt, sigh or sound.

☉ J BREATHING

- Take a quick breath in, then exhale with a long downward and forward breath out.
- As you exhale, visualize directing your breath along the back of your throat into your spine and all the way down through your birth path.
- Let out a big sigh and relax your body as you breathe out. Breathe normally and let the contraction guide you.

☉ POSITIONS

- Semi-sitting
- Sit on the toilet for a few contractions
- Supine
- Side-lying
- Hands and knees
- Squatting
- Standing

Relax the pelvis and lower part of the body. Release any tension in the pelvic floor.

☉ ACTIVITIES

- Change positions every 30 min or more if progress is slow.
- Focus on relaxing your bottom. Relax your throat and jaw.
- Warm moist compresses may help relax the perineum.
- Have someone hold a mirror so you can see the top of your baby's head begin to show during a contraction.
- Touch your baby's head to feel how close you are.

THIRD STAGE OF LABOR-
THE BIRTHING STAGE

CROWNING PHASE - BIRTH



Crowning occurs when the top of the baby's head is seen at the vaginal opening.

- Change positions and wait on baby.
 - The perineum needs time to release, stretch, thin and open around the baby's head.
 - Slow down the birth of the baby's head.
 - Stop pushing and breathe out or lift your chin and blow or pant throughout the contraction to keep from pushing.
 - No Epidural: You may feel a burning sensation. This is the cue to slow down, pant or blow and ease the baby out.
 - Epidural: Follow directions to slow down and breathe or pant or blow the baby out.
 - Relax your jaw, your throat, your teeth, your tongue to relax your perineum.
 - Let your uterus push. Focus on releasing your bottom.
- Touch your baby! Put your hand down so that you have the joy of escorting your baby out with your OB or midwife.

Positions that reduce the risk of perineal trauma, especially in 1st time vaginal births:

Hands and knees

Side lying lateral for head rotation and gentle birth

If slow: hanging squat, standing squat, stand and walk during contractions, sit on toilet.

If fast: hands and knees or sidelying lateral for head rotation and gentle birth

THIRD STAGE OF LABOR-
THE BIRTHING STAGE

THE BIRTH OF THE PLACENTA

- ⊙ Your uterus will continue contracting to deliver the placenta. You may be asked to give a little push to help deliver the placenta.
- ⊙ Hold your baby skin to skin immediately and uninterrupted if possible.

CESAREAN BIRTH

- ⊙ If surgery is necessary for the health of you and your baby, you can utilize relaxation breathing to help you be present and calm to welcome your new baby and hear it's first cries.
- ⊙ You can ask to hold your baby with assistance immediately after birth or even experience skin to skin with your baby while still in the operating room.





CHANTAL TRAUB

HEALTH COACH • DOULA • EDUCATOR



Giving birth is one of the most significant events of any woman's life. Whether a natural physiological birth or an epidural birth is planned, my goal is to help you be birth ready and confident!

For more information regarding me and my birth coaching services, please visit my website, www.chantaltraub.com