



# *Breathing* FOR BIRTH

by Chantal Traub, CD(DONA), CCCE, LCCE,  
Certified Doula, Childbirth Educator



# PRE LABOR PREP



## BREATHING IS A VIABLE COPING STRATEGY.

When we feel fear, tension and pain, the breath may become shallow, fast and irregular. To calm, relax and focus on you, bring attention to your breath. The power of breath is within your own ability to focus and channel. Breath is something that is always with you. Connect to your breath to soothe you and provide an anchor.

# PRE LABOR PREP

## ④ CALM BREATHING

Breathe in through the nose and exhale slowly and gently through the nose or mouth. Drop your shoulders, relax your jaw and let go of any tension. If you have a pregnant stuffy nose, breathe in and out through the mouth while focusing on the breathing out.

## ④ DIAPHRAGMATIC OR BELLY BREATHS

Slow, controlled abdominal breathing. Breathe to your center and connect with your baby. Sense the lateral expansion at your back where there's more space.

## ④ PELVIC BREATHS

Breathe in with the awareness of the lengthening and relaxing of the pelvic floor. Breathe out, allowing the pelvic floor to return to its resting state.

## ④ FOCUSED BREATHING

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

## ④ COUNTING BREATHS

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

## ④ SOUNDING BREATHS

Low hum, chant, sing or audible sigh.

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.



# FIRST STAGE OF LABOR



## BREATHING IS A VIABLE COPING STRATEGY

When we feel fear, tension or pain, the breath may become shallow, fast and irregular. To find calm, equanimity, and relaxation, bring attention to your breath. Connect to your breath to anchor yourself and to relax and ready your nervous system to reduce the pain experience.

# EARLY PHASE

At the beginning and end of each contraction, take a breath and then breathe out slowly and gently.

Begin calm breathing when contractions are intense enough that you can no longer walk or talk through them. Use calm breathing for as long as you find it helpful. Switch to another pattern if you become tense and can no longer find calm and relaxation during contractions

INHALE



EXHALE

# ACTIVE PHASE

Find your own rhythm. It may take 5-7 breaths to move through a contraction.

A steady breathing rhythm may help you feel relaxed and calm, especially if you release tension on the breath out. You always have control of your own breath. Take easy breaths in and a longer breaths out.

Try different variations to see what's right for you, focus on the exhalation:

## FEEL CONNECTED WITH YOUR BABY OR OTHERS DURING THE EXHALE

- Breathe as if you are climbing a hill. When the contraction begins, focus your attention. Take a breath in and breathe out just loud enough to be heard. As the contraction begins to come down, slow down and allow 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 to release tension.

## COUNTING BREATHS

- Inhale for the count of 4. Exhale to the count of 4-6. Find your rhythm. It is ok if you can only breathe in and out for a shorter count. Try to stay on top of your breathing as the wave of the contraction begins to reach the top. If you lose yourself, catch your breath and find your rhythm again.
- Try to harness your breath to the contraction as the intensity builds. As the contraction wave peaks and then starts to come down, focus on your exhalations and letting go, letting go, letting go.



# FIRST STAGE OF LABOR



## BREATHING IS A VIABLE COPING STRATEGY

Develop strategies ahead of time to deal with the pain, fear and tension in labor to help you stay calm, relaxed and patient, during contractions. Nurture your self-trust and inner wisdom. Practice in order to remain easeful and steady when the labor may become difficult or intense.

# VERY ACTIVE / TRANSITION PHASE

## 🌀 BREATHE AND BUNDLE

Combine with positions, movement, vocalization, affirmations or visualizations.

## 🌀 BREATHING AND VOCALIZATION

Low hum, chant, audible sigh or sing to your baby!

## 🌀 FIND YOUR OWN COMFORTABLE RHYTHM

Find a breathing pattern that has a focused, calming and relaxing effect.

## 🌀 SING, CHANT, MOAN OR COUNT

We often release a strong emotion or physical sensation through sound or some kind of vocal release. Crying is a vocal release of emotions, and our shoulders and throats relax as tears are shed. A low moan helps reduce tension in the jaw or throat which also reduces tension in the pelvis. Breathe in and exhale with a low sound.

POSITIVE VISUALIZATIONS  
ESPECIALLY OF LOVED ONES,  
TRUSTED FRIENDS, OR GOOD  
MEMORIES WILL HELP MOVE  
YOU THROUGH THE PROCESS.



# SECOND STAGE OF LABOR



## BREATH FOR PUSHING

You may exhale or you may hold your breath or a combination of both. Push when you have an urge. Don't rush. Change positions. Push effort at peak of the contraction. Breath - holding as you bear down may be necessary with an epidural or slow descent. Rest your whole body in between the pushing contractions. You may moan, groan, grunt or make sounds as you let your baby out. Pant or blow as your baby crowns to slow down the birth of it's head and to minimize damage.



# RESTING PHASE

Be patient. Rest and wait for the urge to push. Change positions to support the baby into a birth ready position.

## ACTIVE PHASE

### ☉ BREATHE NORMALLY AS YOU WAIT FOR THE CONTRACTION TO BUILD.

Push at the peak of the contraction for 4-7 seconds at a time. To relax: sing, make sound, hum in between the pushing contractions.

### ☉ SPONTANEOUS PUSHING

Breathe out vocally with the urge that comes with the contraction, or gently hold the breath followed by a grunt or other sounds while bearing down, or let it out with a moan and groan.

### ☉ DIRECTED PUSHING

As the contraction begins, focus and breathe in and out a couple of times. Take a breath in and suspend the breath while you bear down, then let out your breath. Take a few quick breaths in and out and repeat, holding and doing a 'proper' strain. Repeat until the contraction ends. In between contractions, take a full relaxing breath and release any tension in the body.

### ☉ J BREATHING (UJJAYI BREATH)

Take a quick breath in, then exhale with a long downward and forward breath out. (Practice on the toilet)

# CROWNING PHASE

Breathe out or lift your chin and blow/pant throughout the contraction to keep from adding force. When you feel a burning sensation, blow itty bitty birthday candles to allow the perineal tissues to stretch gradually.

Relax your jaw, throat, teeth and tongue. Let the sound out! Om, aah, ha.

# THE PLACENTAL STAGE

- 🌀 The third stage of labor. Your OB/midwife will guide you. They may suggest a little push for the placenta. Hold baby skin to skin if possible. Enjoy your baby!

# CESAREAN BIRTH

- 🌀 If surgery is necessary. Calm breathing to be present and calm and ready to meet your baby and hear their first cries.