

Obstetricians and Gynecologists, P.C.
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BREATHING PATTERNS AND EXERCISES

Every pregnant woman can benefit by exercises designed to prepare her body for the physical effort she will have to make during labor. These exercises are not meant to be harmful or strenuous. Their purpose is to improve your general well being and to increase the elasticity of the pelvic floor. A healthy and physically fit body potentiates a healthy mind and outlook on the upcoming labor.

1. **Tailor Sitting (Indian Style)**: Sit cross legged with your back rounded. Do this as often as possible. It will stretch your ligaments so that you will not be uncomfortable in the delivery position and will have less aching afterwards. This will also help relieve backaches before and during labor by taking the baby's weight off your back.
2. **Knee Bounces (Butterflies)**: Sit upright with the soles of your feet together and as close to your body as possible. Gently bounce your knees toward the floor. This will increase the stretch of your ligaments and increase the stretch of the inner thigh muscles to avoid cramps and strain while up in the stirrups.
3. **Kegels**: The tightening and relaxing of the pelvic floor muscles. Increases the control you have over these muscles and allows you to relax them during the second stage of labor. Kegels provide: a quicker recovery period by getting these muscles back in shape; helps you to urinate sooner; provides faster healing of the episiotomy by increasing the blood flow to healing tissues and aids in achieving orgasm.
4. **Pelvic Rocks**: The purpose of these exercises is to retain, as much as possible, the normal balance between the abdominal and back muscles and avoid or alleviate possible back discomfort or strain. The abdominal and back muscles can easily get out of balance due to the increased body weight and the distribution during pregnancy.
 - A. On all Fours: assume crawling position on hands and knees making sure they are perpendicular to the body. Arch your back gently in the air like that of a cat. Then return your back to the level position. Do not use your shoulders or arms.
 - B. On Back: lie on back, knees bent, feet flat. Tighten lower abdominal and buttocks muscles so the normal curvature of the back is again present.
5. **Squatting**: Research shows that changing positions from lying down to squatting can enlarge the outlet approximately 20 to 30 percent. It can relax back pain and improve oxygen supply to the baby. It may also facilitate progression of labor.

We encourage you to incorporate each of the following techniques when doing your breathing patterns. As you progress through the phases of labor each pattern will require more physical and mental effort. We DO understand that labor is hard work and as you practice, you will be able to adjust the rate or your breathing to the work your body will be performing.

A good gauge to determine when to begin using the breathing techniques is when you can no longer walk or talk through a contraction. When you are having difficulty relaxing, or feel restless, or are not getting enough relief, you will want to progress to your next pattern.

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1. **Cleansing Breath:** Begin and end each contraction with a deep cleansing breath. Take a slow, deep, full breath in through your nose and full emptying breath out through your mouth. This provides a good oxygen exchange to begin with. It is a signal to your mind and body and to your coach that the contraction is beginning and ending.
2. **Focal Point:** A picture, object, etc., that you can focus on during your contractions. This will help you avoid being distracted by other things going on in the labor room. Be sure to do this during practice, and then you will be conditioned to your focal point during labor.
3. **Effleurage:** A series of gentle hand stroking, thus enhancing conscious relaxation. It soothes and relaxes muscles, particularly the lower abdomen. Effleurage give you something to do with your hands, helps ease the discomfort of a contracting uterus, provides another point of concentration and produces another point of contraction and provides a special bond with your baby, (giving him or her it's very first backrub!).
4. **Observation:** Your coach needs to be doing the following while you are doing your breathing patterns:
 - a. Watching and encouraging her to stay relaxed
 - b. Watching for those areas that first signal she is getting tense.
 - c. Giving a gentle reminder and/or massage to those trigger areas once her contraction has subsided.
5. **Relaxation:** No one would expect to enter a swimming contest and perform just by reading a book on how to swim; therefore, we do not want you to plunge into labor without learning to cope with its demands. You must practice if you want to stay afloat.

To combat unnecessary mental and physical tension (which is fatiguing), you must condition your body to respond automatically to certain verbal and tactile stimuli. Remember, concentration and relaxation are the best tools you have as you progress into labor, especially when the going gets difficult. Tense muscles will heighten your awareness of pain; together with conscious relaxation and concentration, you can work with the natural process of labor. Allow yourself to work with each concentration, knowing that you are prepared.

Our bodies are made with two types of muscles: those we can control voluntarily, (arms, legs, hands, face etc.) and those which are beyond our power of control (uterus, bowel, etc). Since we are unable to just automatically control those muscle groups, we must substitute the voluntary group to stimulate a contraction, therefore, relaxation occurs. Now you are not going to be lying in the labor room flexing and relaxing your arms and legs to impress the nurses with your flexibility. These relaxation exercises merely teach you to relax certain sets of your muscles while others are contracting in labor. While the uterus is contracting you will be able to relax other muscles of your body at will.

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NOW LET'S GET STARTED!!!!

- A. Lie on your back or side on the floor. Place pillows under your head and knees making sure all joints are flexed.
- B. Have your coach kneel beside you using their palms and fingertips. They will begin massaging starting with your forehead and face. As they progress to all your extremities, they need to remind you verbally to relax-thus conditioning your mind by their verbal stimulus. Stroking should be done away from your body, like pulling the tension out and replacing it with your coach's strength and calmness. While working with your coach, let them know what is relaxing and comfortable for you. Reversing roles can be fun and rewarding.
- C. Active Relaxation: Your coach will give a command to tighten a specific voluntary muscle. While tightening your arm or leg, concentrate on totally relaxing the rest of your body. This tightening and relaxation exercise can also be done alone, allowing you to be more aware of difficult areas to relax.
- D. Try relaxing in various positions especially those you think you will be in during labor-walking, on all fours, on your side, etc. Vary the time you spend each day relaxing, but please practice daily. They do call it labor for a reason. There is going to be a lot of hard work involved!
- E. Enjoy your time together. A little laughter can help ease anxiety, tension and frustration. Also, some quiet music that suits your needs may facilitate relaxation.

BREATHING PATTERNS:

- 1. Slow Chest: Six to nine breaths per minute, in through your nose and out through your mouth, slow and relaxed. Start this breathing pattern only when necessary and use it as long as possible. Remember this is chest-centered breathing. The labor process increases the speed of this and makes breaths in and out faster. As you breathe, you will make the "huh" sound.
- 2. Slow Pant: Approximately one breath per second, in and out, through your mouth. The inhalation/exhalation rhythm should be equal. Remember to keep your breathing patterns quiet so as to conserve energy. Your goal is to provide a slow steady pace that adjusts to your ever-changing needs. This breathing makes a "heh" sound.
- 3. Fast Pant: As labor intensifies you must utilize more concentration and relaxation. Fast pant in approximately 2-2 ½ breaths per second, in and out through your mouth. However, you must find a rate of speed or modification to allow for maximum oxygen and comfort. As you do the fast pant, make the "he" sound.
- 4. Accelerated Pant: A helpful modification of our breathing patterns would incorporate the slow and fast pant patterns. You may begin slow pant breathing and as the concentration intensifies, adjust your pattern to match the height of your contraction with fast pant breathing. Gradually slow your pattern as the contraction subsides. To illustrate this pattern, imagine the waves as they build up on the shore-line.
- 5. Pant Blows: The fast pant pattern is used with the interjection of a gentle blow after a series of pants. The 3 variations:

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- a. Three pants to one blow 3-1, 3-1, 3-1, etc.
- b. Stair step or ladder pattern 5-1, 4-1, 3-1, 2-1, 1-1, and then back up the ladder
- c. Number call-outs or using of cards to determine the number ratio: pants/blows.

In an effort to prevent hyperventilation, you must learn each pattern and as you practice, evaluate yourself and make changes accordingly. Remember to concentrate on keeping your breathing rhythmical, relaxed, as slow as is comfortable and well controlled. In case you are wondering if this is all worth the effort, allow yourself to endure one contraction without your pattern. I'm sure you'll agree it is worth the extra effort.

Blowing: To avoid pushing, you must blow out loudly and forcefully. You cannot push until completely dilated and you have instructions from the doctor or nurse. Breathe in and out through your mouth and blow forcefully enough to be heard and the breath be felt at some distance. Coaches may need to blow with her to keep her from pushing.

Pushing: You will begin pushing during the peak of a contraction, when the nurse or physician says the time is finally "right". First time mothers begin in the labor room and women who have children before will initiate pushing in the delivery room.

LABOR ROOM: Have your coach support and elevate your head with a pillow. Bend your knees and place your hand over or under them, hold your legs apart bringing them back toward you. Keep your back and buttocks flat on the bed, rounding your head and shoulders like a tube of toothpaste. Take two cleansing breaths, hold the next breath and bear down with your abdominal muscles. Remember to push down and out relaxing your pelvic floor and pushing your baby's head through your vagina. Hold your breath for approximately 10 counts (depending on you and the contraction). Drop your head back slightly, carefully blowing out all of your air. Take another deep breath and repeat the procedure. You can usually get 3 pushes in on one contraction. End your contraction with a cleansing breath and relax completely.

DELIVERY ROOM: Your legs may be in the stirrups and hands on the hand grips. Use above procedure.

Please practice pushing by reviewing the breathing but not bearing down.