



Breathing & Relaxation

There are many childbirth education classes that teach many ways to breathe during labor. While all of these classes have different breathing patterns, there is not necessarily one that is better than another. You will need to find the breathing technique that works for you. The similarity with most of the breathing techniques taught is the **deep abdominal breath**.

To facilitate a deep abdominal breath you will need to practice it during pregnancy. Early in your pregnancy, you can lay on your back with a dictionary or other book with weight on your stomach. If you are beginning this later in pregnancy, you can use your hand in place of the book. With each breath, look for the book to rise. If it's not rising, you are not taking a deep abdominal breath. Focus on your abdomen rising and filling your lungs as full as you can with each breath. Many women find that after a few of these breaths they are getting a little sleepy. Great! You have taken the first step toward teaching your body to relax upon command.

Keep practicing this. Do it when you feel stressed during the day, when you are changing from one activity to another, when you are laying in bed getting ready to nap or go to sleep for the night. As with most things, practice makes perfect. When you begin to feel contractions you should do a set of these breaths throughout the contraction focusing on letting all of your muscles relax during the contraction. If you find it difficult, you can also try to lean over a countertop or table and let your belly hang while taking these breaths. This will teach your body to let the stomach muscles relax. Knowing how to allow your muscle to relax during labor is a great way to reduce the intensity of the sensations you will be experiencing. If you should allow tension to control your muscles during contractions you will be working against your body and causing more pain. You may also cause your baby to not be able to continue in an optimal position for birth.

I would like to encourage you to take a childbirth education class in your community. I recommend a class that lasts several weeks and covers all stages of labor, what is happening in your body during each stage, and how to best work with your body to make your labor as efficient as possible. Some options include The Bradley Method, Lamaze, Hypnobirthing, Hypnobabies, and Private classes taught by experienced educators. Spending money on a great childbirth education class is an investment that you can reap many returns on while you grow your family.

Resources

| Name | Website |
|----------------------|--|
| ❖ The Bradley Method | ❖ www.bradleybirth.com |
| ❖ Birth Boot Camp | ❖ www.birthbootcamp.com |
| ❖ Lamaze | ❖ www.lamaze.org/FindALamazeChildbirthClass |
| ❖ Hypnobirthing | ❖ www.hypnobirthing.com |
| ❖ Hypnobabies | ❖ www.hypnobabies.com |

Positions & Other Comfort Measures

Many position changes during labor can help your contractions be more efficient, shorten labor, reduce the need for analgesia, reduce surgical interventions and reduce the need to augment labor. Also, staying hydrated, well nourished and keeping your bladder empty can help keep you more comfortable. Here are several ways to keep moving during labor.

Things to do on a Birth Ball

- ❖ Gentle Bouncing
- ❖ Figure 8's
- ❖ Rocking (front to back or side to side)
- ❖ Kneeling Lunge Support
- ❖ Standing Sway

Comfort Activities in Labor

| | |
|-----------------|-------------------|
| Hands and Knees | Lunging |
| Showering | Walking stairs |
| Squatting | Bathing |
| Walking | Dancing |
| Swaying | Side Lying |
| Leaning | Pelvic Rocking |
| Sitting Upright | Sitting on Toilet |
| Standing | Semisitting |
| Standing lunge | Partner Dangle |

Things Your Partner Can Do

| Stage | | |
|----------------|--|--|
| All Labor | Encourage frequent bathroom breaks Provide healthy snacks | Offer words of encouragement Provide lots of fluids |
| Early Labor | Play games or watch a movie Light Massage Time contractions | Hair brushing or stroking Cuddling Ensure supplies are ready |
| Active Labor | Identify tension spots & tell her to relax them individually. Rhythmic breathing Encourage her to "melt" into her location Help with visualization Help her focus on something Massage Cool cloth Warm compress | Say "Good" as she releases tension Suggest position changes Say "Just like that" as she melts Calm, gentle tone Gentle stroking Counter pressure Encourage low, deep moaning Maintain a comfortable temperature |
| During Pushing | Fluids Provide physical support as needed | Words of encouragement Hold a mirror so she can see if desired |

References

- Simkin, P. (2001). *The birth partner: everything you need to know to help a woman through childbirth*. Boston: Harvard Common Press.
- Simkin, P., Hanson, L., & Ancheta, R. (2016). *The labor progress handbook: early interventions to prevent and treat dystocia* (3rd ed.). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons Inc.