

A decorative graphic in the top left corner consisting of several overlapping, curved, grey shapes of varying sizes, resembling stylized human figures or abstract forms.

Hints and tips for birth

This leaflet outlines some activities to help manage your contractions and avoid becoming tense during your labour and birth. Speak to your midwife if you have any medical conditions before using any of these suggestions.

When we are anxious, fearful or nervous, our body's response is to release adrenaline and to tense our muscles, which can often cause pain. Your uterus (womb) is made up of layers of muscle, and the process of labour is those muscles contracting and relaxing to open the cervix. If you are tense those muscles do not work as well as they could - and cause feelings of pain. This is called the Fear-Tension-Pain cycle.

There are techniques you can use to break this cycle, both physical and mental.

Movement

- With feet hip width apart and knees gently bent, stand, dance, circle the hips or sway.
- Walk / climb stairs sideways with a partner supporting you to widen the pelvis and help the baby descend in the birth canal.
- Sit or gently bounce on a birth or exercise ball with a partner supporting you.
- Lean or sway against the birth ball by placing it between your back and a wall.
- Focus on the movement - not the contraction.
- Match any movement to the pace of your breathing.
- Try to keep your knees lower than your bottom in any position that you are in.
- Use a mat on the floor and kneel on all fours.

Breathing

- Focus on keeping the inward and outward breath soft and steady.
- Breathe in through the mouth and slowly blow the breath away as you keep your lips soft and rounded.
- Gently blow the breath out in a rhythm, 1, 2, 3 like a blowing a candle out.
- Blow the breath away as though you are blowing a feather or ping pong ball away.
- As you progress and the contractions get stronger, slightly increase the pace of your breathing at the height of a contraction. 'HA HA PHOOOO (during contraction) and then count 1, 2, 3'. Then slow down as the contraction fades away. Do not breathe too fast or you will feel lightheaded.
- If you feel that you want to push before your cervix is fully open try blowing out strongly through pursed lips. Find the pattern of breathing that suits you. Remember, everyone is different. These are just suggestions.
- Focus on your breathing not the feelings during a contraction.

Sound

- Sigh or hum.
- Say “Ooooooowwww” and link this with your movement.
- Say “Aaahh,” either long and soft or short and strong.
- Focus on the sound not the feeling during a contraction.

Hands and legs

- Keep hands relaxed not clenched.
- Tap, pat or slap (gently!) on your thighs.
- Count while patting your hands.
- Shake your hands loosely.
- Roll the birth ball backwards and forwards while a partner stands near to support you.
- While kneeling on all fours flap your feet up and down or wiggle your toes.
- March on the spot or pace up and down.

Visualisations

- Focus on something real such as a picture, spot on the wall or flower, or a partner.
- Focus on an internal image for example think about the baby moving down.
- Imagine a colour for the pain changing to a different colour for resting
- Imagine a shape for the pain changing to a different shape for the resting.

Words

- Can be spoken by you, a partner or the midwife.
- Can be used with movement and rhythm.
- “Keep moving” “Come on baby” “Well done” or words you relate to Think about these now and write down what works and does not for you.
- Some find positive affirmations help, there are many to choose from if you don’t have one of your own - see <https://www.hypnobirthingplace.co.uk/blog/positiveaffirmations> for inspiration. A powerful strong contraction brings your baby closer.
- “Let it come....feel it’s power...you are strong...now it’s gone.”

Support

Having someone with you to support and encourage you, either by helping you with the above suggestions or by utilising massage techniques can help reduce your anxiety and promote a positive experience. You may be birthing without a support person, but your midwife will be with you throughout to provide this support.

References

1. <https://www.formodernmothers.com/blog/breaking-the-fear-tension-pain-cycle>

To find out more about our Trust visit www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.

Consultant Midwives, March 2013

Reviewed: December 2023

Next review due: December 2025

Our Maternity Strategy and Vision

'Working together with women, birthing people and families to offer compassionate, supportive care and informed choice; striving for equity and excellence in our maternity service.'

You can read our maternity strategy here

