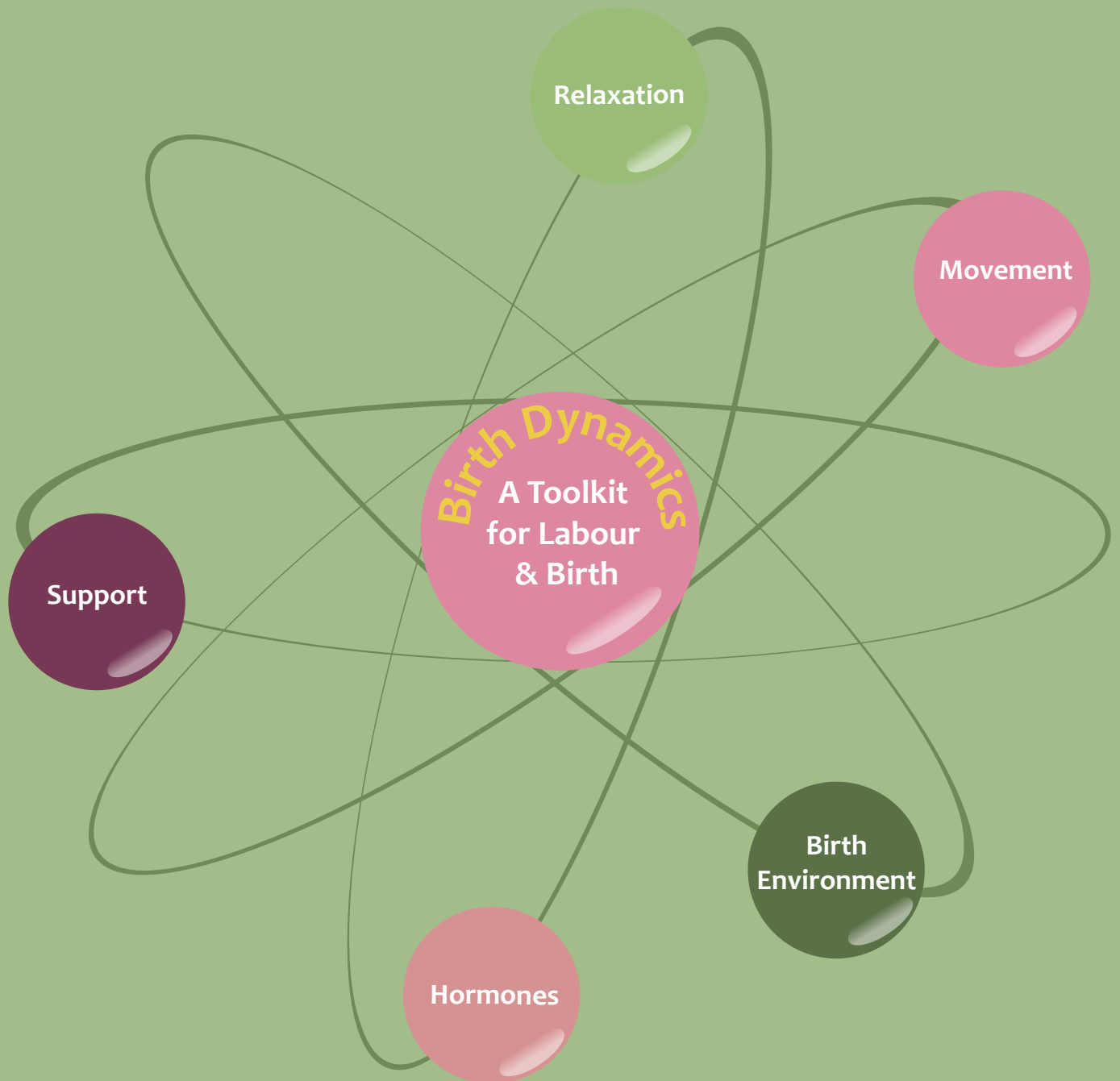


Birth Dynamics

A Toolkit For Labour & Birth



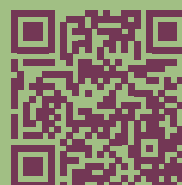
Developed by The Department of Parent Education at The Coombe Hospital
to Empower You on Your Birthing Journey

The Birth Dynamics Programme

Birth Dynamics is a programme of preparation for birth, based on the most up to date evidence. The programme has been developed to support you in labour, optimise physiology and empower you on your birthing journey. The Birth Dynamics programme is a toolkit for labour and birth for both you, your birthing partner and support team to use as birth unfolds. It contains techniques and supports that will assist you to navigate the intensity of labour, support the birthing process and help you to feel in control. Irrespective of your pathway for birth, it is essential that you are well equipped with the necessary tools to optimise the physiological, social and ecological processes of childbirth and as such, this toolkit is for all women and birthing people.

In order to get maximum benefit from the Birth Dynamics programme, we recommend that you use this workbook in conjunction with the video “**Birth Dynamics, A Toolkit for Labour & Birth**” available on the hospital website and attend an Antenatal Education course at the Coombe Hospital.

To view all components of the Birth Dynamics Programme scan this QR code or visit our website: www.coombe.ie/birth-dynamics



To listen to our audio recordings and relaxation scripts scan this QR code or visit: www.coombe.ie/relaxation



Birthing Partners

All families are unique and come in many wonderful variations. Whether you have a life partner or are a solo parent we use the term birthing partner to refer to the person you have chosen to support you through pregnancy and birth. If you do not have such a person in your life, please reach out to us if you would like any additional support along the way.

Gender Identity

In this workbook we use the words woman, mother and mum. The majority of research we have consulted in creating this programme has been based on the mother and baby. If you do not identify as female, you might find this uncomfortable. Please reach out to us if you would like a version of this workbook in a different format.

Disclaimer

The information in this manual has been developed by The Department of Parent Education at The Coombe Hospital who recognise that the needs of all women are individual. The material is intended as a guide only, to support you along your birthing journey.

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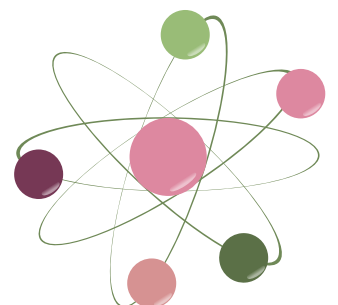
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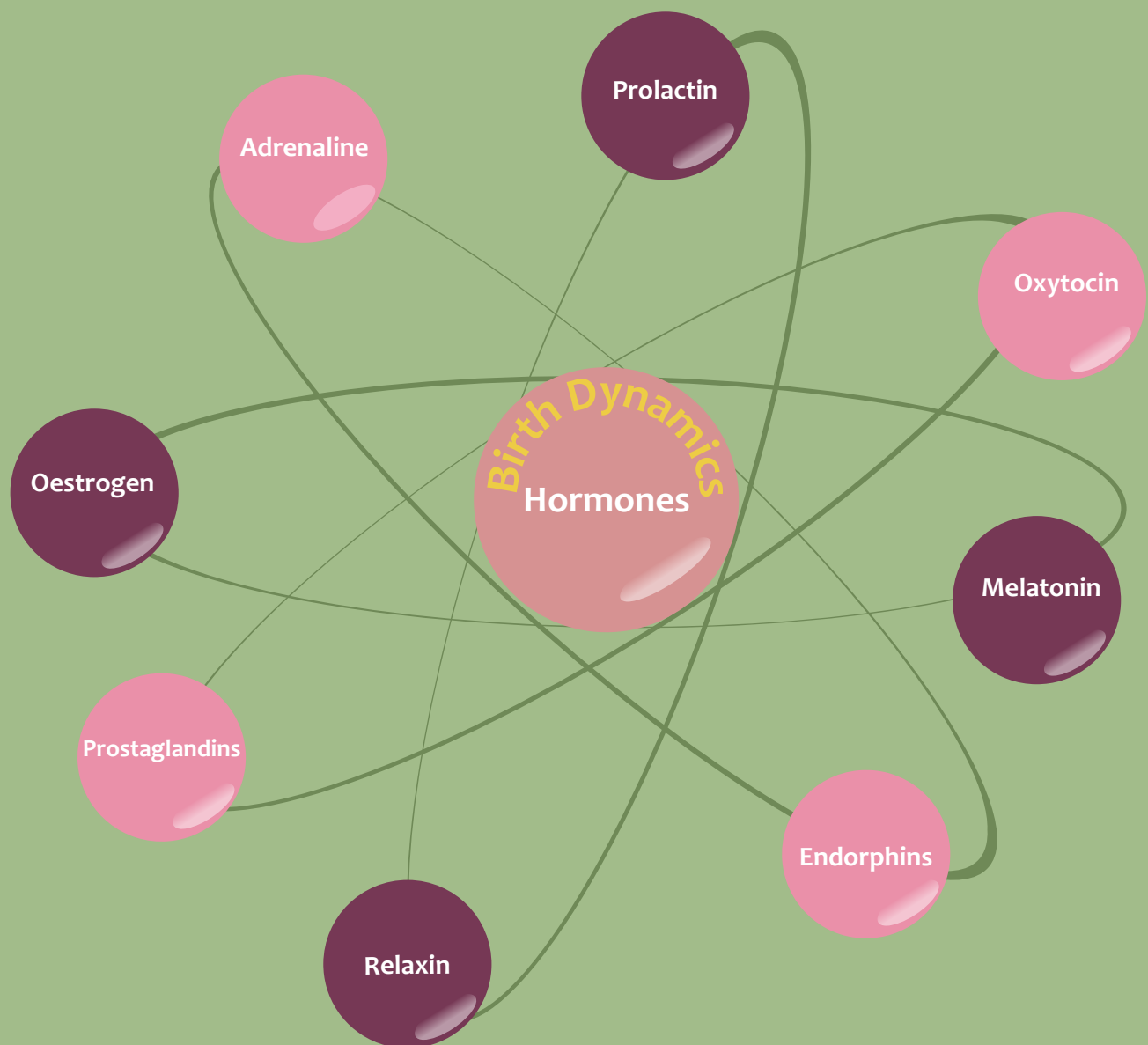
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Understanding the Role of Hormones

Women's bodies have their own wisdom when it comes to labour and giving birth. How the body works throughout the birthing process can be significantly influenced by many factors, one of which is a delicate balance of hormones. Hormones are the body's chemical messengers which transport messages from one area or system of the body to another. They are the messengers of pregnancy, labour, birth and of connection and bonding. They are the messengers of calm, love, stillness, breastfeeding and they are the messengers of tender mothering.

When the flow of hormones is optimal, the process of labour is enhanced and the labouring woman feels calmer and more in control. Stimulating a woman's natural hormonal responses to labour helps her to manage the intensity of labour, helps to reduce the discomfort of contractions and is instrumental in allowing the strong muscles of the uterus to work effectively.

In contrast, when the balance of hormones is disturbed, labour can become more challenging for both the labouring woman and her baby and the whole process of labour can slow down and sometimes even stop. When labour slows down, intervention is more likely and it is therefore essential that women are supported with the mechanisms necessary to maintain optimal hormonal release.

Becoming a New Mother

"The moment a child is born, the mother is also born. She never existed before. The woman existed, but the mother, never. A mother is something absolutely new.", Ragnesh

At birth, the mother and her new baby are bathed in a delicate cocktail of mothering hormones which enable the smooth transition of the labouring woman to a new mother and stimulate early interactions between mother and baby. Optimal hormonal flow will now begin to play a hugely important role in mother-infant bonding and attachment, helping the new mother connect with and nurture her baby and help them both to feel calm, relaxed and secure.

It is absolutely fundamental therefore that in preparation for childbirth and new motherhood you gain a thorough understanding of how your labouring and mothering hormones work, and what you can do to stimulate their natural release and an optimal flow. Sharing in this knowledge and preparing the toolkit necessary to enhance hormonal flow, will help you to feel more confident in your own body. This will help you to respond instinctively to the physical and emotional demands of childbirth and new motherhood using all of your senses and your most accessible tools -

Breath, Movement, Sound, Touch, Light and Smell.

There are many important hormones involved in the birthing process which include:

Relaxin and Prostaglandins

Relaxin is a hormone produced in the ovaries and placenta in preparation for childbirth. It relaxes the ligaments of the pelvis allowing it to expand and make more space for the baby along the path of birth. Together with hormone-like compounds called prostaglandins, relaxin plays a key role in softening, increasing elasticity and widening the cervix during the birth process. The release of prostaglandins is stimulated by pressure on the pelvic tissues from the baby's descending head as it moves downwards during labour and birth. Pressure exerted on the cervix by the baby's head also stimulates the release of oxytocin - another important hormone involved in the birth process. Working in harmony with one of the body's most accessible features, that of movement, together with the use of gravity, can greatly enhance the process of birth as it aids the descent of the baby and the subsequent release of oxytocin and prostaglandins.

Oxytocin

Oxytocin is the hormone of love, calm and connection. It evokes feelings of love, kindness, joy and calm. It reduces anxiety and helps you to feel secure. Oxytocin is also the powerful hormone that causes the womb to contract during labour and birth. During labour, oxytocin is released in pulses causing rhythmic contractions of the womb. In the first stage of labour, contractions push the baby downwards into the pelvis and gradually open the cervix or neck of the womb. In the second stage of labour, contractions push the baby down the birth canal and out at the time of birth. The more oxytocin that flows freely and uninhibited around the body, the more effective contractions will be in helping labour to progress. Oxytocin circulates not only in the blood but also in the nervous system and to the brain and as such offers huge emotional rewards to both mother and baby. As oxytocin crosses the placenta and reaches the baby during labour, the baby also benefits from the calming, pain-relieving and emotional effects of oxytocin. There are many important factors that trigger the release of oxytocin inclusive of having an optimal birth environment, using relaxation techniques, freedom of movement and continuous support during labour.

However the release of oxytocin can be inhibited when labour is disturbed by noise and interruptions, fear, lack of privacy and support. Oxytocin release can also be inhibited by bright lights, hunger and thirst and by the release of adrenaline. Ultimately when oxytocin release is inhibited, the process of labour can slow down or even stop and intervention is more likely.

At birth the release of oxytocin is triggered by skin to skin contact, breastfeeding and eye contact between the mother and her new baby. A quiet, safe and undisturbed space with optimal postpartum support in the weeks after birth can play a key role in supporting optimal hormonal flow. High levels of oxytocin during labour and in the postpartum period are essential not only for connection and bonding but also for recovery, healing and growth. It is therefore absolutely essential that as part of your preparation for birth you are well equipped with the necessary tools to optimise the release of this hormone both during the birthing process and in the transition to new parenthood.

Endorphins

Endorphins are the body's natural pain-relievers and are released in response to pain and stress and promote feelings of wellbeing. High levels of beta-endorphin are present during pregnancy, birth and breastfeeding. In early labour endorphins are released gradually and in unmedicated labours, levels steadily rise helping the labouring woman to manage the intensity of contractions, enabling her to enter into an altered state of consciousness or become 'zoned out'. Endorphin facilitates the release of prolactin in labour in preparation for breastmilk production and breastfeeding. High levels of endorphins

also play a key role in bonding and attachment.

Adrenaline and Nor-Adrenaline

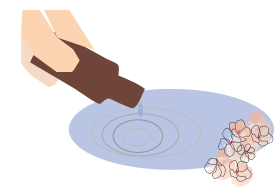
Adrenaline is the hormone produced by the body in times of stress, fear or anxiety, hunger, thirst or cold. High adrenaline levels in labour, which reflect women's fight or flight response to fear or anxiety, inhibit the production of oxytocin thereby slowing down labour or in some instances causing labour to stop.

The release of nor-adrenaline during the fight or flight response also reduces the blood flow to the womb and placenta and therefore the baby. This causes the muscles of the womb to become exhausted and go into spasm causing further pain. The release of adrenaline is stimulated by activity in the neocortex or the calculating side of the brain. Therefore too much focus on clocks and watches and numbers during childbirth can also stimulate the release of adrenaline and subsequently inhibit the release of oxytocin. It is therefore extremely important, particularly in early labour that you try not to focus on timing and clocks but instead nurture the relaxation side or emotional brain by the use of relaxation techniques and supports. It is this side of the brain that is responsible for the release of oxytocin. The less adrenaline that is produced, the more oxytocin and the easier it will be for labour to progress. The less adrenaline that is released the more comfortable you will be during contractions.

Adrenaline and nor-adrenaline do however play an important role towards the end of labour when their levels peak and these hormones form part of an incredible concoction of hormones which surge at birth. This hormonal surge ignites instinctive maternal behaviours in the mother and an awakening of the baby - a physiological event cleverly designed to ensure both mother and baby are alert and excited when they first meet in the new environment of life outside the womb.

Prolactin

Prolactin is the hormone of tender mothering and breast milk production. The release of prolactin makes the mother very protective over her newborn baby and stimulates her acts of total nurture. At birth while in skin to skin contact, the mother and her new baby are bathed in a perfectly designed fusion of hormones which enable gentle mothering, breastfeeding and connection to begin. Deep in this hormonal cocktail lie oxytocin - the hormone of love, endorphins - the hormones of pleasure and prolactin - the hormone of mothering. When conditions are right and this very fine orchestration of hormones is optimal at birth, the mother and her new baby begin to establish their relationship and rhythm and lay the important foundations of secure attachment.



Creating an optimal birth environment together with the use of relaxation techniques and freedom of movement, will help you to respond instinctively to the intensity of childbirth using your most accessible resources – breath, movement, touch, sound, light and smell. Stimulating your natural hormonal responses to birth in this way will help you to navigate labour, work with physiological pain and help you to feel in control.

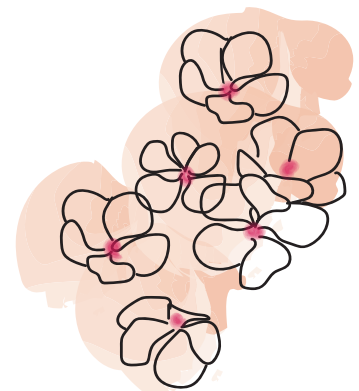


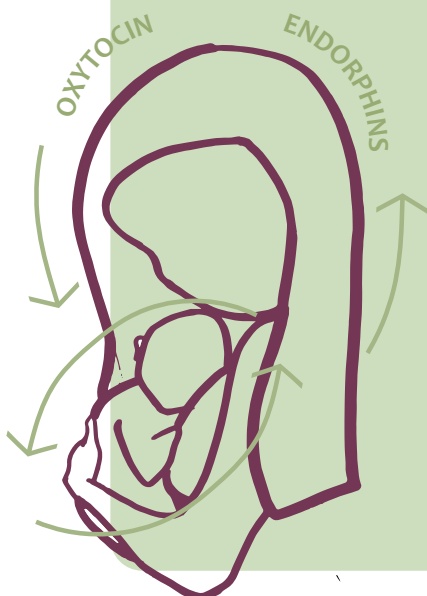
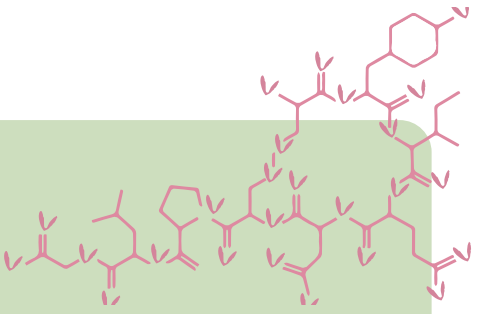
The benefits of an optimal hormonal flow during labour and birth:

- Helps optimise the birthing process.
- Helps encourage the spontaneous onset of labour.
- Helps you to feel calm, comfortable and in control.
- Helps you to manage the intensity of contractions.
- Helps contractions to be effective.
- Helps labour to progress.
- Helps to calm your baby throughout the labour process.
- Assists you as a new mother in your transition to parenthood.
- Enhances mother - infant bonding and attachment.
- Helps to calm and soothe your new baby.
- Enhances breast milk production and a woman's experience of breastfeeding.
- Promotes recovery and healing.

What can I do to encourage an optimal flow of hormones throughout my birthing journey?

- Prepare for childbirth through education and practice.
- Maintain a quiet and relaxing home environment during pregnancy, taking time out to rest, relax and connect with your growing baby.
- Practise pregnancy yoga.
- When labour begins, create and maintain an optimal birthing environment.
- Change positions regularly.
- Use relaxation techniques.
- Keep the postpartum environment calm and quiet.
- Skin to skin contact with your new baby at birth and for the days and months that follow.
- Eye contact with your baby.
- Breastfeeding.





What can I do to enhance the release of oxytocin during the birthing process?

- Create optimal conditions for birth.
- Minimise noise and interruptions.
- Use relaxation techniques such as rhythmic breathing, massage and visualisation.
- Avoid too much focus on clocks and numbers.
- Move about freely and change positions.
- Keep well nourished and hydrated.
- Keep comfortable and warm.
- Keep a calm and supportive birthing partner by your side.

What can I do to reduce the release of the hormone adrenaline during early and active labour?

- Prepare for childbirth through education and practice.
- Try to control stress, fear and anxiety by learning and using relaxation techniques and preparing for childbirth.
- Avoid cold, hunger and thirst.
- Avoid looking at clocks and watches as much as possible.
- Avoid interruptions from people, loud noises and sounds.

HORMONES

Checklist for Labour

What can I do to enhance the flow of hormones throughout the birthing process?

Prepare for labour and birth during pregnancy

☐

Create an optimal birth environment

☐

Minimise interruptions and noise

☐

Move about freely

☐

Use relaxation techniques

☐

Keep warm

☐

Keep well nourished and hydrated

☐

Protect the postnatal environment, keep it calm & undisturbed

☐

Practise skin to skin contact at birth

☐

Throughout the following 4 modules of the Birth Dynamics programme, you will learn techniques and supports which will be instrumental in optimising hormonal activity during pregnancy, birth and new parenthood.

The Role of Hormones

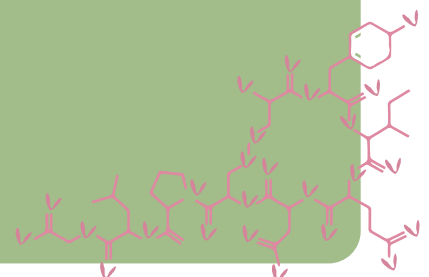
What can I do during pregnancy to promote hormonal activity which encourages spontaneous onset of labour?

What may be helpful in early labour to enhance the flow of hormones, which will help me to feel calm & comfortable?

Checklist

☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

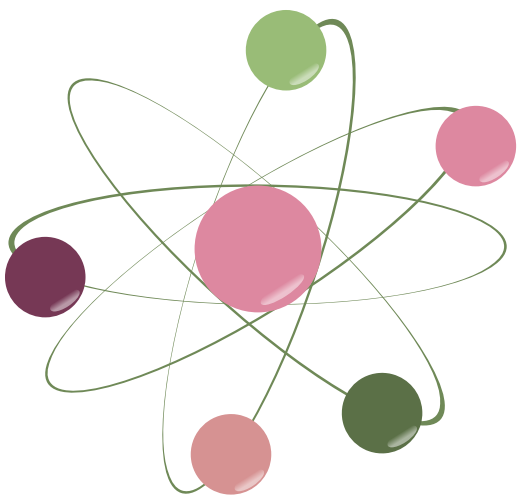
Why is this so important to the process of labour?

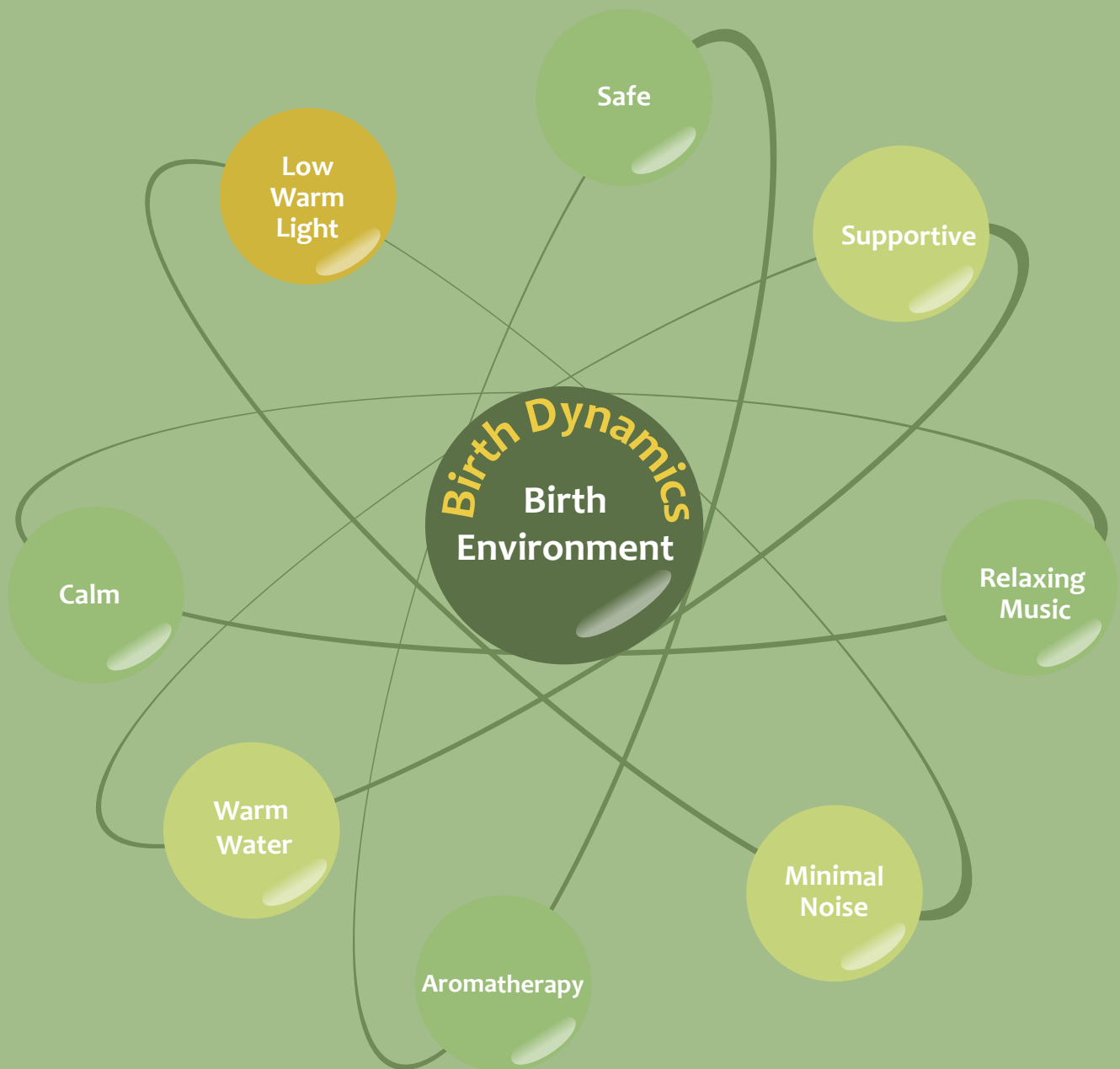


What may be helpful in active labour to encourage optimal hormonal activity and help the labour process?

How can my birthing partner help me through transition?

Why is the optimal release of hormones so important in the transition to new motherhood?





The Birth Environment

The physical environment for birth plays a key role in promoting positive experiences of childbirth and has the potential to promote the health and wellbeing of women. The overall focus when thinking about the **Birth Environment** is on creating a space in which a woman is most likely to feel safe and supported during labour and birth. This will involve keeping the environment calm and protected in the constant presence of a calm and supportive birthing partner.

Maintaining optimal conditions for birth, both in your home and in the hospital, will help support optimal physiology of the birth process and therefore the smoothest transition from pregnancy to motherhood.

The benefits of an optimal birth environment:

- Gives women a sense of control.
- Helps women to feel safe and protected.
- Helps women to relax during labour.
- Enhances hormonal activity which supports the labour process.
- Helps birthing partners to relax. When they are calm she is calm.
- Supports bonding and attachment at birth and breast milk production.

How can you achieve this?

- Physical and emotional support.
- Keep lights low.
- Minimise noise and interruptions.
- Gentle relaxation music.
- Use your birth space to support movement.
- Have access to hydrotherapy.
- Have access to nature and natural light where possible.

Establishing the Birth Environment in Hospital

Moving to the hospital for birth, means moving during labour, from the familiar territory of home to the unfamiliar territory of the hospital. For many women, this transition is stressful and can interrupt labour causing it to slow or stop.

It is therefore of great importance that on arrival to the hospital you create and maintain a calm and peaceful space to labour and give birth. Establishing optimal conditions for birth is a very positive way in which birthing partners can support the labouring woman in the birthing room.

Your midwife will support you in establishing this setting and we actively encourage mothers and birthing partners to bring with them props that may help in establishing a calm environment such as **battery operated tea lights, LED candles (warm), a playlist of music, a portable music device and small speaker, earphones & laminated positive affirmations.**



Creating an Optimal Birth Environment

What can you do to create this type of environment?

Dim the lights and use low warm lighting

Use tea lights, salt lamps and warm table lamps. This will help to stimulate the release of the hormone melatonin and the subsequent release of oxytocin helping you to keep calm and relaxed. Melatonin works in tandem with oxytocin, improving its function and enhancing and regulating contractions. Warm red spectrum lighting has also been shown to improve women's oxytocin levels in labour as opposed to bright white clinical lights which inhibit the release of melatonin and oxytocin and stimulate the release of adrenaline.



Minimise noise and interruptions

Keeping birth as undisturbed as possible will help maintain optimal hormonal activity and therefore support the birth process. Try to avoid interruptions from people, loud voices, doors opening and closing and exposure to noise including phones. Where possible try to avoid too much looking at clocks and watches and numbers.



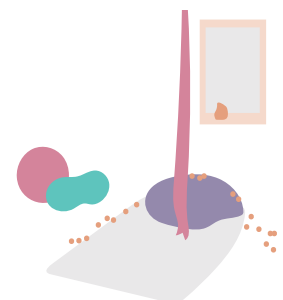
Play some relaxation music

Music has been used as a tool for pain management over the last number of decades and can be used to decrease anxiety and sensations of pain during labour through distraction. This will help you to relax and increase your oxytocin levels. Playing recordings of natural sounds like flowing water and birdsong may have a calming effect.



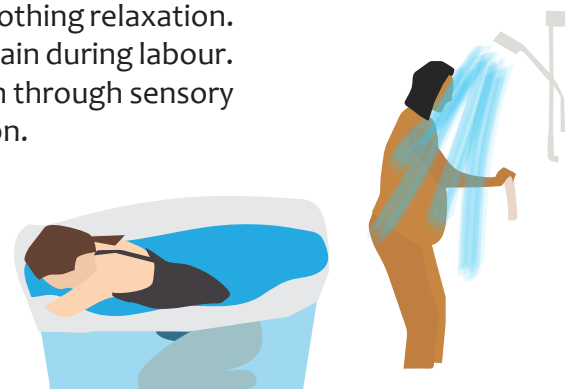
Organise your birth space to support movement & active birth

Have access to props such as a birthing ball, peanut ball, a beanbag or cushions, birthing mat, a chair, all of which will assist you in adopting upright positions making the process of labour easier for both you and your baby.



Access to warm water

The use of warm water will provide you with a sense of soothing relaxation. Women perceive warm water to be helpful in managing pain during labour. The use of warm water stimulates the release of oxytocin through sensory stimulation using the shower or through water immersion.



A supportive team

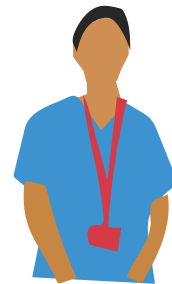
Women who have continuous support during labour and birth have better outcomes with lower rates of intervention, less use of pharmacological pain relief and shorter labours. Women who have continuous support in labour are more satisfied with their birthing experience. Support is provided by your partner, birthing partner, midwife and your team in the form of both physical and emotional support.



An Active Birth* approach

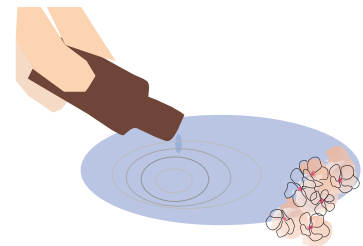
Active Birth refers to 3 key concepts to support a woman throughout her birthing journey: It encourages the use of instinctive upright positions during labour and birth, it stimulates the woman's natural hormone responses and the woman is supported and empowered to make her own choices about birth.

*Janet Balaskas Active Birth Centre www.janetbalaskas.com



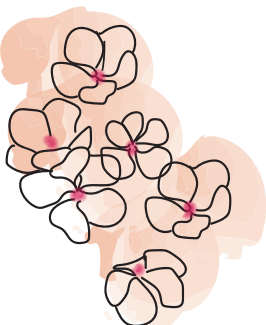
Consider aromatherapy

There is a strong link between emotion and smell with pleasing aromas having the capacity to lower anxiety and pain perception. Aromatherapy draws on the healing powers of plants with the use of essential oils to enhance physical and mental wellbeing. The oils may be massaged into the skin (when used with a carrier oil), used in a bath or inhaled using a steam infusion.

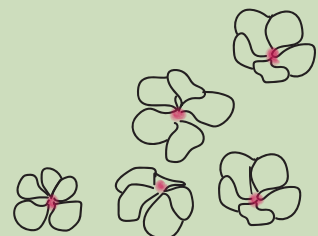


The pain of labour can be intense with fear, tension and anxiety making it worse. Many women would like to labour without using drugs or invasive methods such as an epidural and turn to complementary therapies such as aromatherapy, massage, mind-body techniques and hypnosis to help reduce their perception of pain.

*Essential oils are very powerful and they need to be used carefully. They should not be applied directly onto the skin but used as directed either in a carrier oil or diffuser. It is important that you only use oils that are safe for pregnancy and labour so please consult a properly accredited Aromatherapist for advice before use. Please discuss the use of aromatherapy with your team before use if you have any underlying medical conditions or any complications of pregnancy.



Notes:



Module 2 - The Birth Environment

Hydrotherapy

Hydrotherapy refers to the use of water as a complementary therapy for health purposes. During labour this may be a warm shower, bath or birthing pool. Used with the rest of your toolkit it can be very relaxing and therapeutic. Hydrotherapy provides women with a sense of soothing and a supportive environment and women perceive it to be helpful for pain relief. The release of oxytocin is promoted through sensory stimulation from showering or water immersion helping to keep the labouring woman calm and relaxed.

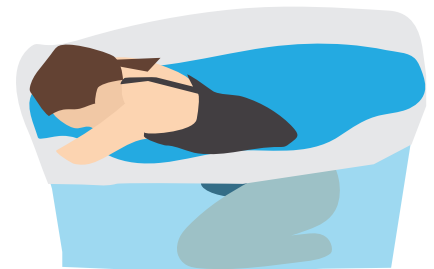


When would you use it?

- Take warm showers or a bath at home in early labour.
- Take warm showers in early labour if you are labouring on an antenatal ward.
- Take warm showers in your birth suite.
- The Birthing Pool can be used in active labour in your birthing suite (suitable if you are having a low risk pregnancy).

Water immersion in the birthing pool

Water immersion in the birthing pool during labour has been shown to shorten the length of labour, reduce the need for pain-relieving drugs and it may increase the chances of having a vaginal birth. The use of a birthing pool during labour has been shown to enhance women's overall experience of childbirth.



In the birthing pool, some women like to wear a sports bra or a short top, while others are more comfortable without clothing.

Notes:

BIRTH ENVIRONMENT

Checklist for Labour

What can I do to create a space in which I am most likely to feel comfortable, calm & in control during labour and birth?

- Use low warm lighting or dimmable lights of your choice e.g. LED tea lights & salt lamps ☐
- Minimise noise and interruptions ☐
- Use relaxation music and calming sounds ☐
- Consider aromatherapy for childbirth* ☐
- Have access to warm water ☐
- Set up the birth space to support mobility and freedom of movement ☐
- Have access to equipment which supports upright positions & active birth e.g. birthing ball, peanut ball, beanbag, pillows & mat ☐
- Pin up positive affirmations around your birth space ☐
- Maintain a quiet, calm and supportive environment ☐
- Have continuous support throughout labour and birth ☐
- Where possible have access to nature ☐

*Essential oils are very powerful and they need to be used carefully. It is important that you only use oils that are safe for pregnancy and labour so please consult a properly accredited Aromatherapist for advice before use. Please discuss the use of aromatherapy with your team before use if you have any underlying medical conditions or any complications of pregnancy'

The Birth Environment

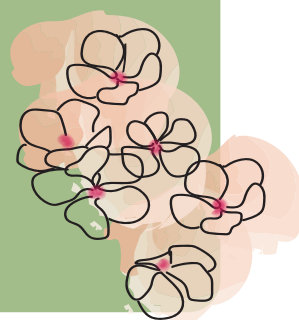
What can I do during pregnancy to prepare an environment which supports the labour process?

What can I do in early labour to create optimal conditions for birth?

Checklist

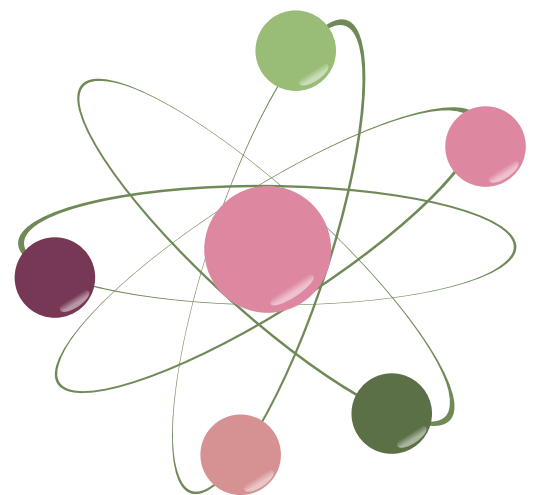
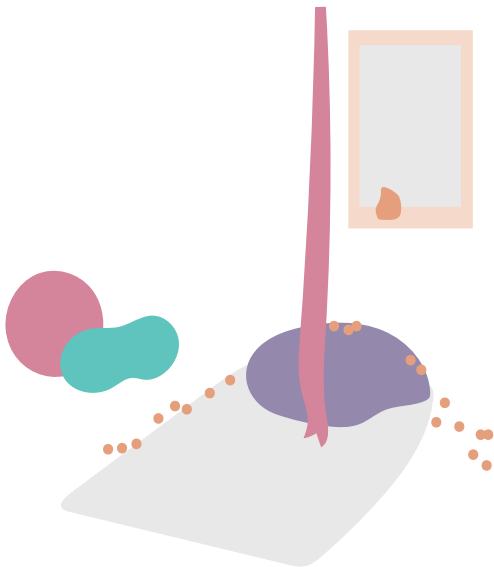
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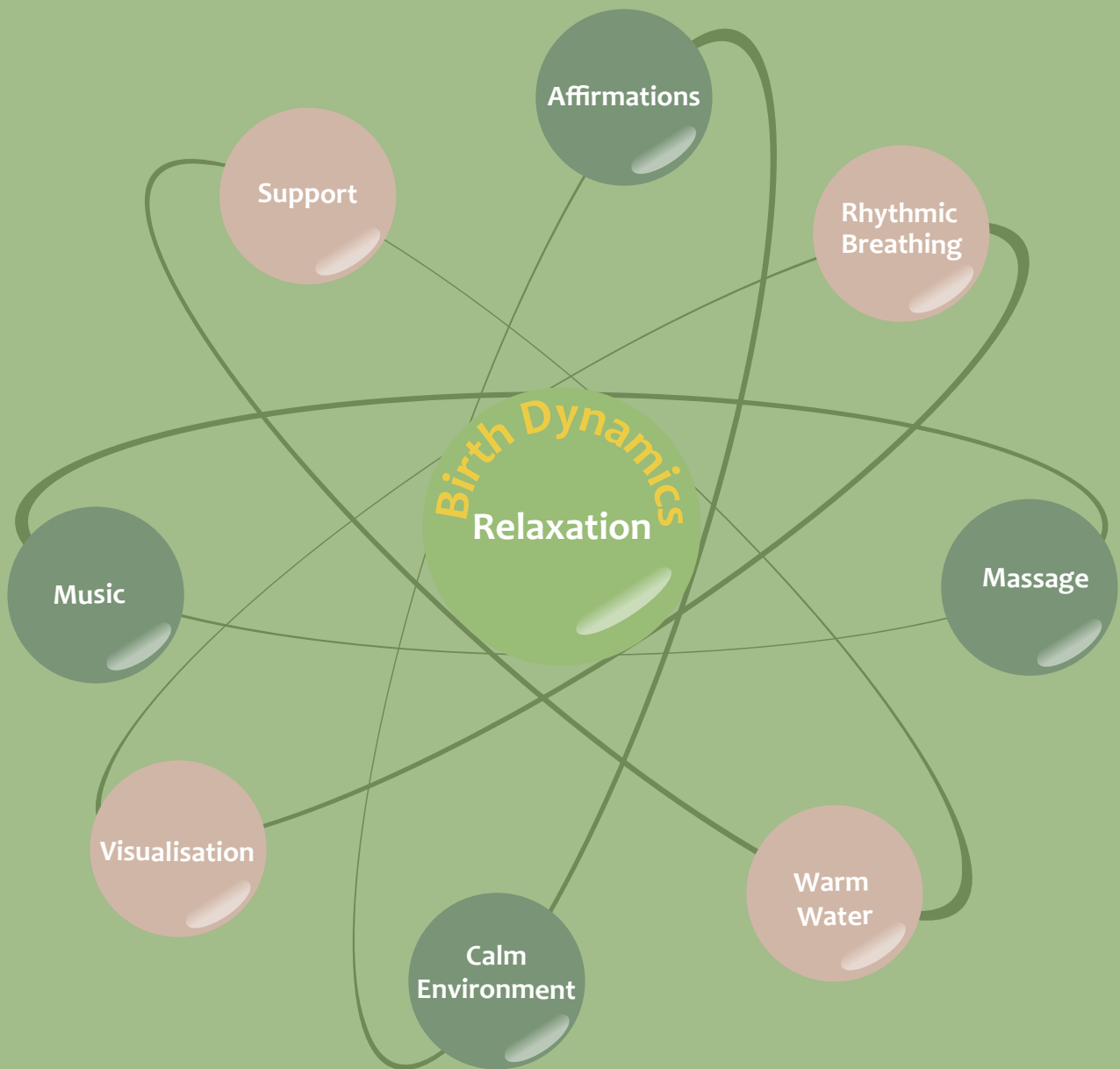
Why is this so important?



What can I do in active labour when I move from home to the hospital environment to create optimal conditions in the birthing room?

Why is it so important to maintain and protect the same conditions in the postpartum period and beyond?





Relaxation for Birth

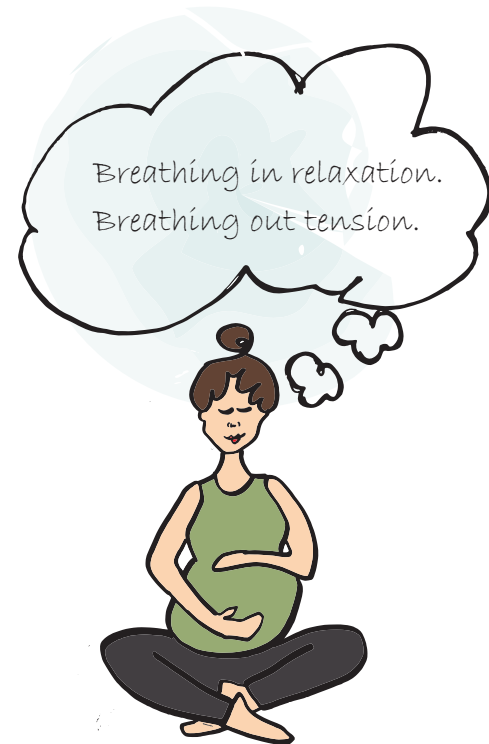
Learning the art of relaxation in preparation for labour and birth will enhance your ability to work with the sensations of labour and is a powerful tool in helping you to manage the experience of birth in a positive manner.

In the first module of your Birth Dynamics programme the importance of hormones and how they impact on labour and birth were discussed.

A key component of your Birth Dynamics programme, together with an optimal birth environment, is supplying you with the tools to help you to relax during labour. The use of these relaxation techniques is essential to optimise the physiology of labour because of the influence they have on hormonal activity in labour.

Using relaxation techniques during your labour encourages the hormones oxytocin and endorphins to flow freely around your body, enabling labour to progress and helping you to feel calm and more in control. This in turn helps to increase your confidence.

Feeling more relaxed can help to break the fear, tension, pain cycle (see page 26) by minimising the amount of adrenaline you produce. Keeping adrenaline to a minimum enables oxytocin to flow, ensuring your contractions are effective and helps labour to progress.



Relaxation techniques:

- Relaxation scripts
- Hypnobirthing
- Breath work
- Visualisation
- Positive Affirmations
- Massage
- Acupressure*
- Movement and positions
- Hydrotherapy
- Music
- Aromatherapy*
- Pregnancy yoga
- Optimal Birth Environment
- Support

Benefits of relaxation:

- Can help you to feel calm and relaxed, promoting a sense of control.
- Helps keep oxytocin flowing.
- Reduces the production of adrenaline thus helping labour to progress.
- Helps you to cope with the intensity of contractions.
- Relaxes the pelvic floor and releases tension.
- Enhances your experience of labour & birth.

*See page 36 for more information on acupressure and page 18 for aromatherapy.

Module 3 - Relaxation

Fear, Tension, Pain Cycle

During labour, adrenaline is released when you feel anxious or stressed and the fight or flight response is triggered. This diverts blood and oxygen away from non essential organs to prepare your body to flee from danger.

The uterus is considered a non essential organ and when oxygen and blood are diverted away it causes the muscles of the uterus to tense up and spasm, causing more tension and pain. It also inhibits the production of oxytocin causing labour to slow down or stop, increasing the need for intervention.

It is of fundamental importance therefore that you understand how your body works and that you use all of the relaxation techniques in your toolkit in times of stress and anxiety to break the fear, pain, tension cycle.

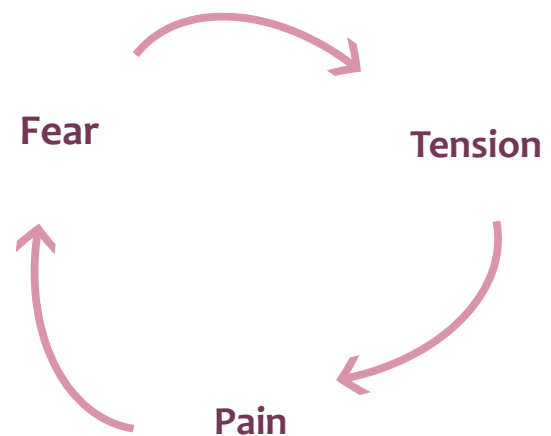
Childbirth is an amazing, instinctual and empowering experience but it is often portrayed in a negative light as an inherently dramatic and risky event. You may have your own worries or concerns about pregnancy, labour and birth but practising these relaxation techniques during your pregnancy can benefit you, your birth partner and your unborn baby. Regular practise during pregnancy can help you to feel more positive and confident about birth. With regular practice both you and your birth partner will be more comfortable and confident using these techniques when the time comes.

Using relaxation scripts during pregnancy helps you become familiar with a deep state of relaxation. Listening to relaxation scripts can help to reduce anxieties and tensions you may be feeling about labour. They help to prepare your mind and body to think positively about birth. When the time comes to give birth you may find it easier to instinctively relax, feel calm and in control.

Relaxation scripts are available on our website, or perhaps you have chosen to use hypnobirthing as part of your preparation for labour and birth, in which case there will be specific scripts as part of your chosen course. It is really important to practise using relaxation scripts regularly, either by listening to them or having your birth partner read them to you. With regular practice the ability to relax will become second nature to you and will be of great benefit during labour. As labour progresses you may not be able to focus on a full script but in the early stages of labour when it is important to rest as much as possible, listening to or reading a script can be so comforting.

Practising pregnancy yoga is an ideal opportunity to learn some breathing and relaxation techniques that can be helpful throughout pregnancy, labour and birth. Giving yourself the gift of gentle exercise to nourish your body and mind may help to reduce stress and anxiety, to improve strength and flexibility and prepare your body for the miracle of birth.

Regardless of what pathway your birth takes, it should be a positive experience and while you can't control every situation you can control your reaction to it. Employing all the techniques in your toolkit will support you and your birth partner by helping you to remain as calm and relaxed as possible.



Suggestions for Early Labour

During early labour, contractions may be mild and intermittent before getting longer, stronger and closer together. This is a time to rest and relax when you can, in a peaceful and calm birth environment at home or in hospital. Have regular drinks and snacks to keep yourself hydrated and nourished. If you find it difficult to sleep or lie down, there are many positions you can adopt that can help you feel more comfortable. These will be covered in the next module of the programme. Listen to some music, have a bath or shower, go for a walk, use a TENS machine, or listen to a relaxation script. Your birth is unique to you so do what makes you feel good and what will help you to relax.

RELAXATION

As labour progresses and contractions get more intense, using the whole toolkit will help keep you focused. Concentrating on your breathing, adopting different positions and movements and getting a massage are some of the tools that will impact on your birth experience. Having a range of options and strategies to choose from in your toolkit enables you to be an active participant in your birth.

RHYTHM &

During your labour you may find your own ways to relax, find your own rhythm and create your own ritual for birth. You can find yourself overwhelmed by the sensations of labour but by combining your rhythmic breaths, using your toolkit, with movements such as swaying, rocking or circling your hips you can create your own ritual. This will help to maintain a feeling of calm and relaxation and promote a feeling of control.

RITUAL

Birth is instinctual, listen to your body, do what is comfortable for you and with support you can do it!

Relaxation tips for early stages of labour:

- Go for a walk.
- Watch a movie.
- Cook a nice meal.
- Ask your partner for a massage.
- Rest.
- Listen to a relaxation script.
- Create a calm birth environment.
- Tens machine.
- Have a bath or shower.
- Listen to some upbeat music.
- Connect with your baby using massage, rhythmic dance & movement.

Your birth partner:

It is important that your **birth partner** is involved, understands and is comfortable with all the actions and techniques in this workbook including relaxation. It is essential that your birth partner is relaxed, as they are your emotional and physical support at home and in the hospital.

They are your **advocate**.

Module 3 - Relaxation

Breathing for Labour & Birth

Relaxation and breathing are closely intertwined. Our breathing reflects on our state of relaxation or agitation in our day to day lives as well as in labour. Usually if your breathing is slow and steady it helps you to feel calm and enables you to release tension. However, when you are tense and anxious you can hyperventilate causing you to feel more stressed and anxious. While focusing on your breathing during labour and birth cannot take away the pain, it is a powerful tool to help you manage the intensity of contractions.

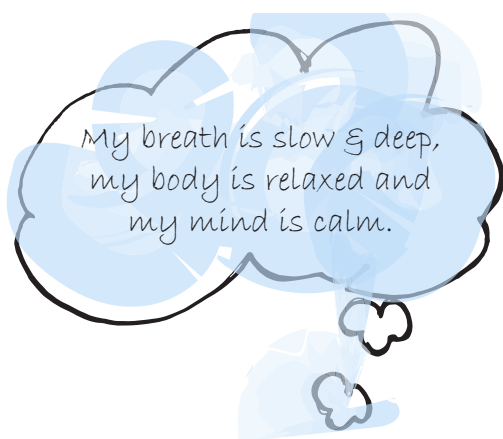
During pregnancy, practise your breathing for birth, perhaps using relaxation scripts, hypnobirthing or during a pregnancy yoga class. As it needs practise for it to work effectively we recommend that you start as early as possible in pregnancy.

In early labour, at home or in the hospital you may be able to talk through contractions. Just breathe normally and go about your normal activities if you can.

As labour intensifies you will need to focus on your breathing to help you manage each contraction. Take one contraction at a time and rest between each one. Breathing normally while you rest will help to release tension.

Remember every woman is different and you will find your own rhythm for birth. Sighing, moaning, singing or groaning can all be part of your unique rhythm. Using your breath with the rest of the toolkit will help you to avoid breathing too fast or hyperventilating and will give you the confidence to believe in your ability to birth your baby and encourage you to instinctively relax in labour.

Benefits of focusing on your breathing:



- Helps you to feel calm, relaxed and in control.
- Helps to distract your mind from the sensations you are feeling.
- Encourages the release of oxytocin and endorphins.
- Reduces the production of adrenaline.
- Helps to keep labour progressing.
- Helps to keep all your muscles relaxed and working well.

Belly Breath for Labour

Close your eyes, become aware of your breath, place your hands on your tummy, as you feel a contraction starting, breathe in slowly through your nose and out through your mouth to try and keep your breathing slow and steady.

As you breathe in through your nose feel your chest and stomach expand, as you exhale through your mouth, let all the tension flow out of your body and relax your jaw, shoulders, stomach and pelvic floor. Let all the tension leave your body.

Do the same on the next breath....

And the next.....

Then when it is over relax, rest and breathe.

This is of particular benefit in early labour but as labour becomes stronger you may find your breath becoming shallower. Try to stay focused on breathing in through your nose out through your mouth finding your own rhythm.



After a Contraction

While it can be difficult to be totally relaxed during a contraction, it is enough to keep your breathing slow and steady. Once each contraction is finished concentrate on releasing tension from your body. As you breathe out relax your muscles, your jaw, your shoulders, your stomach and your pelvic floor. Feel the tension leave your body, have a sip of water and rest.

Module 3 - Relaxation

Some suggestions for breath work to use during labour:

.....

Steady breathing in through your nose and out through your mouth. Concentrate on making the exhale or out breath longer than the inhale.

.....

Count each breath in & out to yourself or out loud, during the inhale and exhale. Count in for 2 out for 4, in for 3 out for 6 etc.

.....

Breathe in and moan as you breathe out, relaxing the muscles of your mouth and jaw.

.....

Imagine as you inhale your breath is a soothing pain reliever, as you exhale you are releasing any tension and fear.

.....

Find a spot in the room to focus on and concentrate on it during a contraction as you breathe in and out slow and steady.

.....

As you inhale say the word slow, as you exhale say the word down.

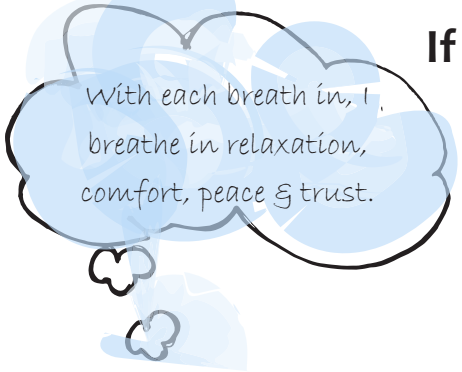
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Your birthing partner could count your breath in and out.

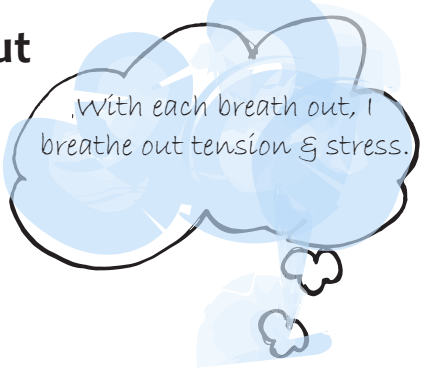
.....

Breathe in through your nose and exhale through your mouth as if you are blowing out a candle.

If in doubt, breathe out



With each breath in, I
breathe in relaxation,
comfort, peace & trust.



With each breath out, I
breathe out tension & stress.

Breathing exercises used in pregnancy yoga such as Spiralling, Golden thread and 3 Part Breath can also be part of your birth toolkit.

During labour & birth there may be times when you feel overwhelmed or panicked. Try to bring your awareness back to your breath keeping it slow and steady. Breath work is a wonderful way to ground yourself, to bring you back to a place of calm and control. There may be occasions where birth partners may have to be gently assertive in order to help regulate your breathing.

There may also be times when your caregivers may need to guide you with your breath work to help you on your journey.



Massage for Labour and Birth

Massage and touch can be very helpful during labour and birth. Light strokes, deeper massage and counter pressure in labour can be used for **pain relief** and to **aid relaxation**.

This supportive touch from your birth partner together with the rest of your toolkit can help you navigate the challenges of birth. It can also be empowering for your birth partner as they are actively involved in the birth.

Research has shown that massage can help block pain signals going to the brain and stimulate the release of endorphins, your body's own natural pain relievers. This will optimise the production of **oxytocin** which allows labour to progress and promotes the release of stress and tension.

Massage during labour can reduce feelings of anxiety and increase your sense of well-being, support and calmness.

During your pregnancy, massage can ease aches and pains and aid a good night's sleep. Practising as part of your relaxation preparation in pregnancy will increase your association of massage with relaxation.

It is of great importance that you practise before the birth, as it means that both you and your birth partner are comfortable with the techniques and you receive all the benefits during pregnancy!

Work out communication before labour begins, for example mum could say "more" or "less" for pressure, "up" or "down", rather than having to give specific instructions.



It is worth noting that however much you enjoy a massage there may come a time during labour where you do not want to be touched. That could be in early labour or as labour intensifies. This is perfectly normal. You may only be comfortable with massage in between contractions, you may prefer a lighter touch, increased pressure or counter pressure.

Every woman is unique and every birth is different. Listen to yourself and to your body during your labour and birth and go with what feels comfortable for you.

Positions and movement which are beneficial for labour such as the use of a birth ball or bean bag, all fours, standing, sitting backwards on a chair and child's pose will be discussed in the next module of the workbook. These are also good positions to be in while receiving a massage.

It is important that the birthing partner or support person giving the massage is also in a comfortable position. If Mum is kneeling, the birth partner should sit on a chair behind her. Don't worry too much about technique. Use light strokes, kneading and pressure and make sure you pay attention to Mum's responses to your touch and massage. Her needs may change during labour or she may not want to be touched at all.

Birthing women can become overwhelmed by the sensations of labour and birth and may become panicky. Holding her hand or stroking the inside of her arm may be all that she needs to regulate her breathing and relax.

Your support and reassurance is so important to her.

Areas for massage:

- Neck
- Shoulders
- Back
- Hips
- Sacrum
- Legs
- Feet

Types of massage:

- Slow light touch.
- Deep circular motions.
- Counter pressure.
- Sacral pressure.
- Hip squeezes.

Shoulders

Place your hands on Mum's shoulders and encourage her to exhale, relax and drop her shoulders down away from her ears. Imagine you are relieving all of her tension. You can keep your hands here or using light strokes brush down her arms using a rhythmic action.

Resting your fingertips on her shoulders, press your thumbs into the muscles across the back of her shoulders. Keeping your thumb tips in contact with the skin, use firm circular motions across her shoulders, be guided by Mum as she may want more or less pressure.



Back

Place your hands on Mum's shoulders, then sweep firmly down her back, using the flat of your hand, either side of her backbone. At the base of the back, point your fingers out sideways and use light strokes to brush to her hips and down the top of her legs.

Starting at the neck, sweep the flat of your hand slowly down one side of her backbone to the base of her back. Before you remove this hand, place your other hand at the top so you have continual contact, with one hand sweeping down and then the other. You can do this in a slow and steady motion helping Mum to breathe rhythmically.

Using the heel of your hand use firm, circular massage over Mum's lower back. Mum will let you know where it feels best. This can feel really helpful during a contraction and you will need to put some weight behind it.



Sacral area

Cup your hand over Mum's sacral area and let the heat of your hand be a comfort. During a contraction using the heel of your hand apply slow circular pressure to her sacrum. Mum can tell you whether to apply more or less pressure.



Counter pressure

Many women find the use of counter pressure during a contraction to be a powerful pain reliever, particularly if they are experiencing a lot of back pain.

Place one or two hands over the base of Mum's back, fingers pointing towards the hips and place pressure on the area.

Use your body weight to apply the pressure and listen to the birthing woman.

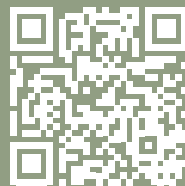


Hip squeeze

During a contraction whether Mum is standing, kneeling or sitting, place your hands on her hip area and put pressure on the hips squeezing them "in" towards each other and "up" towards her shoulders.



Please view our video 'Birth Dynamics a Toolkit for Labour' to watch demonstrations of these techniques.



Module 3 - Relaxation

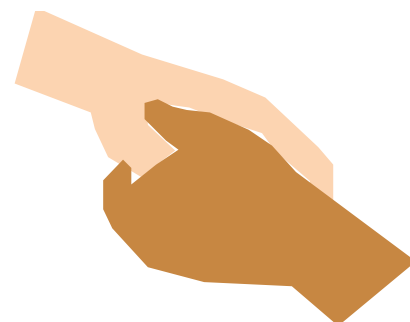
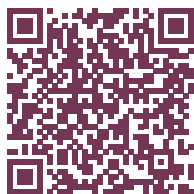
Acupressure

Acupressure is a traditional Chinese medicine which has been practised for over 2000 years. It involves application of pressure using fingers, thumbs or knuckles on different parts of the body to encourage a good flow of energy.

Research has shown that using acupressure, along with other relaxation techniques such as massage, breathing and visualisation, can have a positive effect on your birth experience.

During labour, it is a safe and non-invasive form of pain relief.

Please see [Debra Betts booklet](#) for more information or consult a registered practitioner.



Hand Position



Shoulder position

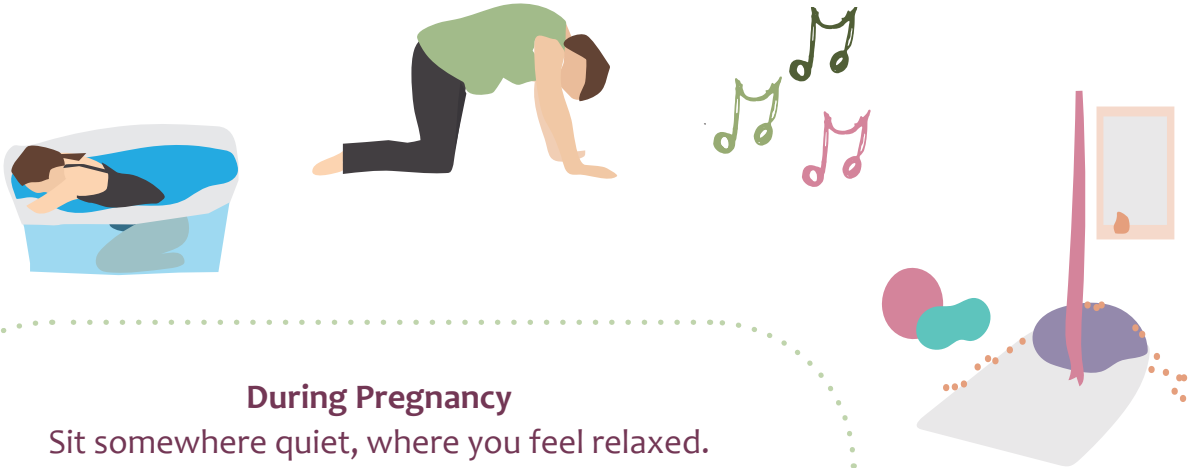
The benefits of acupressure when used in labour are:

- Acts as a natural pain reliever as it stimulates the release of endorphins.
- Helps to induce a sense of relaxation.
- Can help to shorten your labour.
- Empowers your birth partner.

***NB - Acupressure is not recommended before 37 weeks. If practising after 37 weeks use light touch only until the birth. Please refer to your team if you have any underlying medical conditions or complications of pregnancy before use.**

Visualisation

Visualisation is a very important part of your relaxation preparation. Your mind is a powerful tool and when you use visualisation or guided imagery during pregnancy it helps you to relax and prepare your body and mind for birth. Just as professional athletes practise (in their minds) winning that race, you can visualise your birth and picture it going well.



During Pregnancy

Sit somewhere quiet, where you feel relaxed.

Close your eyes.

Think about words you would like to associate with your birth. (You can write them down later as part of your positive affirmations)

Think about meeting your baby for the first time, the journey your baby has to make.

Use your senses to guide you.

What does the room look like?

Is it dimly lit with low warm lighting?

Is noise kept to a minimum?

Are you listening to some music?

Can you see yourself using the shower or bath to help you relax and as a form of pain relief?

Visualise yourself feeling calm and relaxed, using your breathing during each contraction.

Imagine yourself changing positions, using props at home or in the hospital to keep as comfortable as possible.

Can you see your birth partner near you supporting you?

Can you visualise your body opening up, stretching, making space for your baby to be born?

Take time to think about the birth you would like, spend a few minutes every day visualising your birth as a wonderful empowering experience.



Module 3 - Relaxation

Visualisations for Labour and Birth

While it can be helpful to use visualisations when imagining your birth, you may want to use more specific visualisations to manage contractions in the first and second stage of labour. Visualisations can help to distract you from the discomfort of contractions by enabling you to disconnect from the part of the brain that registers pain. This may help you to feel more relaxed, breaking the fear, tension, pain cycle and encouraging the flow of oxytocin and endorphins.

It is important that you practise these visualisations regularly so that you are comfortable using them in labour. It can be helpful to practise your breathing with your visualisations.

Include your birth partner when planning what visualisations to use so they can help guide you on the day.

During each contraction breathing slowly in and out:

Visualise the sun rising, beautiful pinks & yellows flooding the skyline as you inhale, as you exhale see the sun rising into the sky.

Visualise each contraction as an ocean wave, getting higher and higher, reaching a peak and fading away.

As you breathe in imagine yourself blowing up a balloon (in your favourite colour) and as you exhale see the balloon reducing down.

Visualise yourself lying on a beach, sun shining, water lapping. You are feeling calm and relaxed.

Climb a mountain as each contraction starts and as it reaches its peak you are coming down the other side.

Visualise your womb as a tightly closed flower at the beginning and as labour progresses imagine the petals unfurling and opening to a beautiful flower.

Visualise something more personal, a place, a time or a person, an image that is special to you.

You may like to imagine what is happening to your body and your baby, visualise your baby getting ready to meet you.

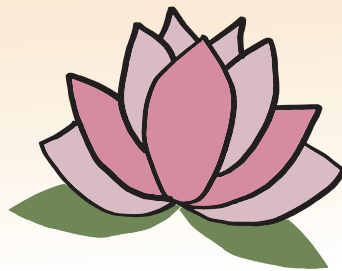
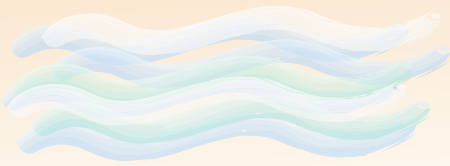
Visualise your baby moving down the birth canal in the second stage of labour.

Breathe in, imagining your in breath as a soothing pain reliever, and releasing all the tension on the out breath.

Focus on a positive affirmation that you have printed off, e.g. I am overflowing with oxytocin.

When that contraction is over, rest, take a drink or change position. You may want to visualise yourself resting somewhere quiet and peaceful, release any tension you may be feeling.

An important element of your birth preparation is planning the visualisations you would like to use as part of your toolkit. Every woman is unique, the most important part of using visualisations is that you make them your own, that you are comfortable using them and you do what works for you.



Positive Affirmations

I'm looking forward to meeting my baby.



Every contraction brings me closer to meeting my baby.

I listen to my body and I do what it needs me to do.

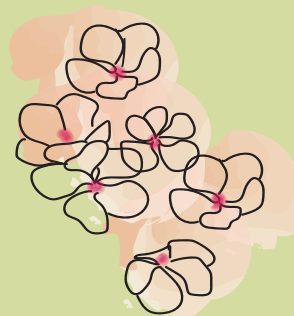
I inhale peace and exhale tension.

My contractions cannot be stronger than me, because they are me.

My baby is the perfect size for my body.

Relaxing my mind, relaxes my muscles.

Where my mind leads, my body follows.



Giving birth is the most wonderful and empowering experience.

Write these affirmations down on separate pieces of card. Put them in your bag, your car, place them around the house and your workplace. Positive affirmations help you to look at birth positively and help your mind to start believing. Bring them into the hospital with you and your birth partner can put them around your birth environment.

RELAXATION

Checklist for Labour

What can I do to aid relaxation throughout my birthing journey to help me to feel calm & in control?

Enhance oxytocin and endorphin levels and reduce adrenaline levels by:

Preparing for labour and birth during pregnancy

☐

Practising breathing for birth

☐

Minimising interruptions and noise

☐

Moving about freely

☐

Using visualisations

☐

Using positive affirmations

☐

Using relaxation scripts / hynobirthing

☐

Using hydrotherapy

☐

Using acupressure*

☐

Listening to music

☐

Practising pregnancy yoga

☐

*NB - Acupressure is not recommended before 37 weeks. If practising after 37 weeks use light touch only until the birth. Please refer to your team if you have any underlying medical conditions or complications of pregnancy before use.

Relaxation

What relaxation techniques can I use during pregnancy to prepare for labour and birth?

What can my birth partner and I do to help me relax in early labour?

Checklist of supports and ways to help me relax:

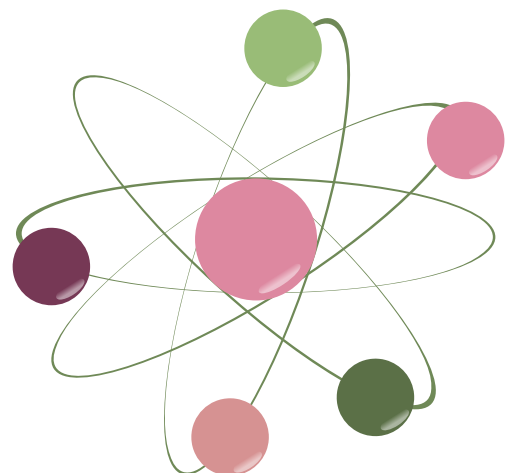
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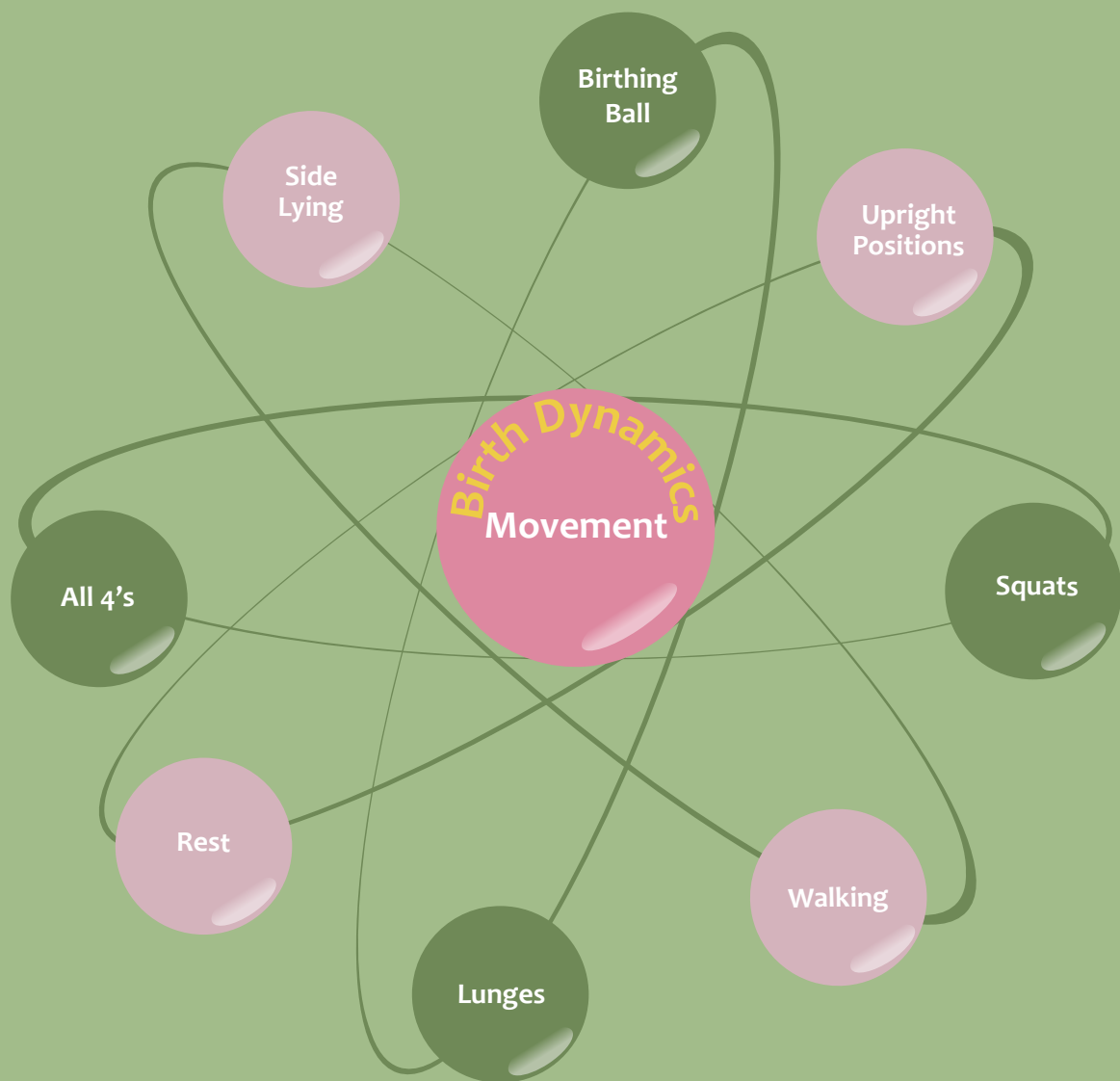
Why is this so important?



How can my birthing partner and support team help (to relax) me when I move from the home environment to the hospital environment?

What can I do in active labour to help me relax as much as possible?





Optimal Fetal Positioning

Helping your baby into a good position for birth

Optimal Fetal Positioning (OFP) is a theory developed by midwife Jean Sutton and antenatal educator Pauline Scott, who realised that the mother's position and movement could impact the position of her baby in the womb during the last few weeks of pregnancy along with other factors.

Lifestyles have changed, women spend more time commuting, longer hours sitting at a desk and generally lead a more sedentary lifestyle. This can all impact on the position of your baby in the womb.

If your baby is head down, facing towards your spine, with their back to one side of the front of your tummy, this can help to make the birth easier for you and for the baby. This is known as the Occipito-Anterior position (OA).

The Occipito-Posterior (OP) position means that your baby is still head down but is facing towards your tummy. This can make labour much longer as the baby tries to turn towards the OA position and can cause increased back pain.

The good news is that there are steps you can take to encourage your baby into an optimal position. It is not a guarantee but practising optimal fetal positioning during the last six weeks of pregnancy is a safe and non-invasive way to encourage your baby to move into a position that is easier for them and for you.

A first baby will usually “engage” (the head moves down into the pelvis) between 34 and 38 weeks but can be later for second and subsequent pregnancies.

*It is important to be active in pregnancy but be particularly mindful about positioning and movement during the last 6 weeks. Discuss with your caregiver at around 34 weeks what position your baby is in and what to look out for. If your baby is breech (it's feet are aimed to enter the pelvis first) at around 34 weeks please discuss your options with your team and refer to Spinning Babies by visiting: www.spinningbabies.com for recommendations on exercises that may be helpful.

Don't worry if your baby is not in the optimal position when labour starts as the baby can turn right up to the moment of and during birth.



Movement & Positions for Pregnancy

Staying mobile during pregnancy will help your baby's position and impact on the balance in your pelvis. Your uterus is made up of muscle fibres and is attached to your pelvis by a number of ligaments which help to keep your uterus in place.

If these ligaments are imbalanced, in other words too tight or too flexible, they can restrict your baby's ability to move into an optimal position.

Therefore it is important during pregnancy to stay mobile to help with the position of your baby and to help relax any tension in your ligaments.

Exercise such as walking, dancing, swimming (front crawl or breaststroke), pregnancy yoga and using a birthing ball may help your baby into an optimal position while helping the pelvic area to stretch and relax.

When using the birthing ball make sure your knees are below the level of your hips, your back is straight and that the ball is the right size for your height and weight.

Hip circles, figures of 8 and rocking side to side on the ball may encourage your baby to move into the pelvis and gently stretch and relax the pelvic area. This can be done watching the TV in the evening.

***NB - Always ensure that you use a durable non burstable ball that is specifically made for pregnancy and birthing. Ensure this ball is the correct size for your height so that you are well supported and get maximum benefit.**



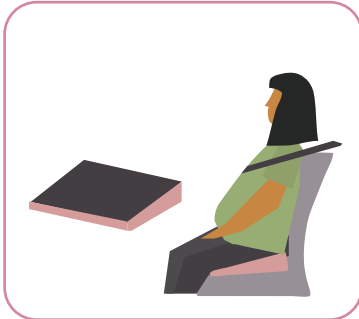
Your Birthing Ball Size Guide

Your Height	Birth Ball Size
up to 165 cm / 5'5"	55cm
up to 173 cm / 5'9"	65cm
over 173 cm / 5'9"	75cm

Remember to:

- Minimise time spent lying back with feet up.
- Sleep on your side as much as possible.
- Make sure you are comfortable and don't overstretch.
- Avoid wearing high heels as much as possible.
- Consult with your team if you have any concerns during your pregnancy.

Exercises and positions that can help during pregnancy:



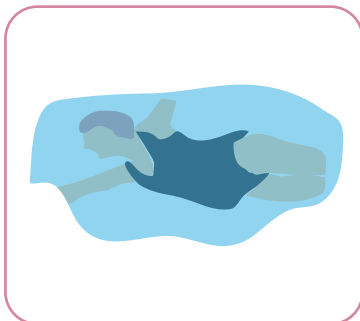
In your car, sit on a wedge cushion so that the pelvis is tilted forward.



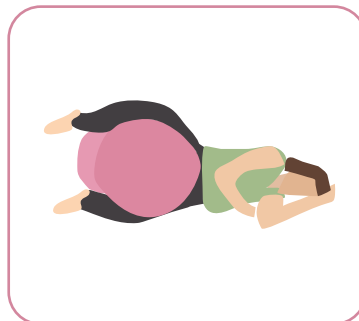
Sit on a chair backwards if watching TV.



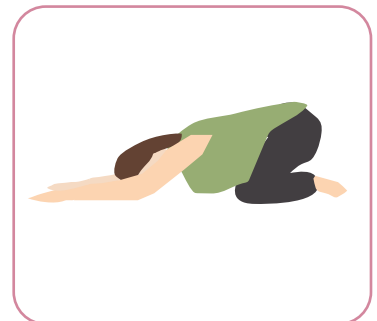
Sit or kneel upright.



Swimming. Front crawl or breaststroke



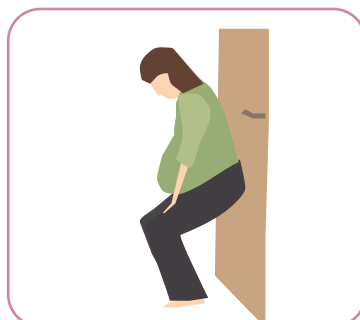
Sleeping on your side or side lying positions.



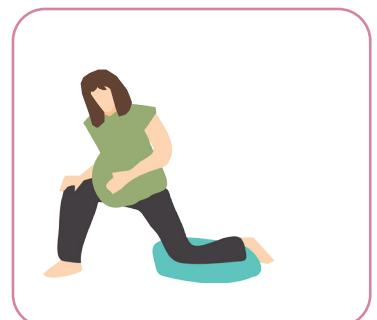
Yoga poses. Child's pose can help to stretch hips and back.



All fours positions - slow hip circles and gently tilting your pelvis back and forward will help relieve back ache.



Squatting* - Squatting can be really helpful but only if your baby's head is down, you are comfortable doing it and you don't suffer from pelvic girdle pain. Be careful to come in and out of this position safely.



Lunging - this can be helpful as it opens your pelvis in different areas, making space for your baby. Use a heavy chair or the wall for support.

*Deep squatting is not recommended if your baby is in a breech position after 34 weeks of pregnancy. For more information please see page 45.

Module 4 - Movement

Movement and Positions for Labour and Birth

Staying active and changing position during labour has many benefits which include reducing pain and working with your body to make yourself as comfortable as possible during contractions. You will feel more in control when you have the freedom to move about.

Using upright positions such as walking, standing, kneeling or squatting will use gravity to help your baby to descend down through the pelvis. The use of upright and forward leaning positions are particularly beneficial in opening the pelvis and making more space for the baby to descend and rotate.

Using props such as a birthing ball, a step or the stairs, a beanbag or a chair, will help you to be comfortably supported while using these upright positions .

As part of your preparation for birth, practise these different positions so that you and your birthing partner are comfortable using them.

It can be a good time to get a massage, listen to a relaxation script or music of your choice.

Use any or all of these positions during labour. From time to time it can be helpful for birthing partners to suggest moving about and changing positions.

It is also important to listen to your body and only use positions that are comfortable for you.

Benefits of movement & upright positions:

- Uses gravity to move the baby down through the pelvis.
- Opens up the bones of the pelvis by up to 30%.
- Acts as a form of pain relief.
- Can help speed up labour.
- Helps make contractions more efficient and effective.
- Can help your baby move into an optimal position.
- Empowers you and can help you feel more in control.
- Diverts your mind away from the challenges of childbirth.

Always remember UFO:

U - UPRIGHT
F - FORWARD
O - OPEN



The Parent Education team promote an Active Birth* philosophy.

Active Birth is a way of describing how a woman behaves when she understands how her body works. She follows her own instincts during labour, has the freedom to move about using comfortable upright positions, stimulates her natural hormonal responses and finds a way to rest in between contractions.

It is simply a way of encouraging you to be an active participant in your birthing story.

Rest

As labour can be a long journey and physically exhausting, it is very important to get as much rest as you can along the way.

In **early labour** it may be easier to rest and conserve your energy. Lying on your left side with a cushion between your legs or sitting on a chair backwards with your arms and your head resting on a pillow over the back of the chair, are positions you could try.

Do what feels right for you, just make sure you are resting and relaxing as much as possible.

As labour moves into the **active phase** it gets more challenging to rest so it is important that between contractions you relax. Let a deep breath out, feel the muscles relax, take a sip of water, rest and recover.



*Janet Balaskas Active Birth Centre www.janetbalaskas.com

Module 4 - Movement

Birth Ball – The birthing ball is a very effective piece of equipment to use during pregnancy and labour. During labour, it comfortably allows you to remain in an upright position gently encouraging an optimal fetal position. It enables an instinctive back and forth or side to side movement as your pelvis is more mobile. It is not advisable to bounce on the ball- just slow, circular movements. **Always ensure that you use a durable non burstable ball that is specifically made for pregnancy and birthing. Ensure this ball is the correct size for your height so that you are well supported and get maximum benefit.** (See page 46)



Upright on the birthing ball

Keeping your knees lower or in line with your hips, open your legs to a comfortable distance and rotate slowly in circular movements rocking your hips. This position can really help to take pressure off your lower back.

It is always advisable to hold onto a well anchored chair for stability when you are using the birthing ball in this way.



All fours using the birthing ball

Place the ball on the floor or bed. Lean forward with your head, shoulders, arms and chest resting on the ball. Open your knees and tilt your tailbone up, sway from side to side or simply rest. This position can be used during a contraction or to help you rest and relax in between.



Comfort measures using the ball

Between contractions while staying on your ball, lean over a bed or chair. In the hospital it can be helpful to raise the bed up to chest height allowing you to rest your head on it in between contractions. This will enable you to remain upright and keep the pelvis open while you rest.

Squats - If your baby is head down, squatting during labour is a great way to open up the bones of the pelvis making good use of gravity to help your baby move down the birth canal.



Supported squat - Hanging squat

Facing your birthing partner hold onto their shoulders or onto their arms in a hanging squat, bend your knees and allow your weight to drop. Keep your feet flat and relax your head and neck remaining in this position until the contraction passes. Equally you can use a heavy and well supported chair or bed for support during a squat.



Supported squat - Standing squat

Stand in front of your birthing partner and let them support you from behind with their arms passing under yours. Let your birth partner take some of your weight, you could sway or rock during a contraction, keeping your feet flat on the floor, feeling well supported and allowing your body to relax. You can also use a bean bag or low chair as support during a squat.

Comfort measures using squats

To avoid lower back strain your birthing partner should place their feet 2-3 feet apart, bend their knees and tighten the muscles of the thighs and buttocks. Keep the back straight relaxing the shoulders and arms to let their thighs provide the support. Sit on a chair if necessary to protect their back.

Comfort measures using kneeling positions

When using any kneeling positions such as all fours or kneeling lunges ensure that you place a padded mat or blanket under your knees for comfort.

Module 4 - Movement

Lunges - Lunges can be beneficial during contractions in the first stage of labour as they can help make more space for baby to turn in the pelvis. A lunge can be good at stretching out the muscles and ligaments making more space. Try a standing lunge using the stairs or a chair or a kneeling lunge, always make sure you are well supported.

If your labour has slowed down lunges can be very effective in helping labour to progress.



Kneeling lunge

Kneel on your left knee and step your right foot slightly to the right side so that you are opening your pelvis. You can use a chair or the wall for support. Gently lunge forward and back during a contraction being careful not to bring the right knee past your toes.

This can be repeated on both sides.



Standing lunge

This can be done using the stairs or a supported stool or chair on the floor. Facing the banisters place your right foot on the stairs facing the rail and your left foot 1 or 2 steps up. Your left foot should be at a right angle to your right foot on the lower step. Gently lunge forward towards your left foot and back again being careful not to bring your left knee past your left toes. Make sure to hold onto the banisters for support at all times. Use the opposite side depending on accessibility to banisters.



Sitting positions

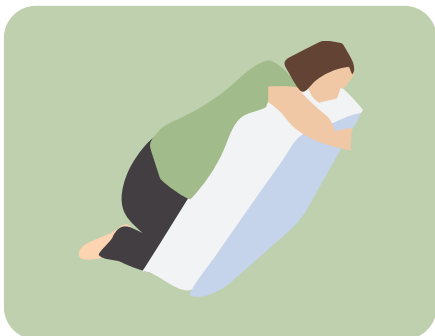
Sit backwards on a chair with your head resting on a pillow or cushion. Your birthing partner can apply some gentle massage to your shoulders and lower back in this position which may help during contractions. Remember to use your slow deep breathing for relaxation. You can also use this position sitting backward on the toilet or use sitting positions on the birthing ball.

All Fours - These positions are helpful to take pressure off your back and can be used in both the first and second stage of labour and is an excellent position for giving birth.



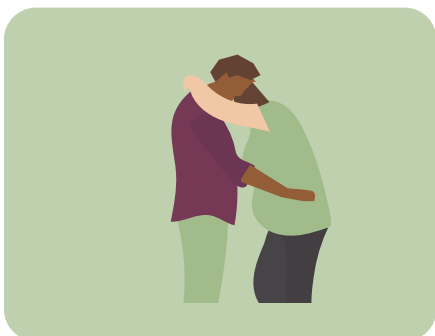
All fours on the floor

Kneel on all fours using a bean bag, mat or cushions for comfort. You can move your hips from side to side, rock forward and back or in a circular motion, breathing slowly and deeply during contractions. Your birthing partner can use deep sacral massage and apply some counter pressure on your hips using hip squeezes in this position where appropriate.



All fours on the bed

Kneel on all fours on the flat of the bed or lean over the back of the bed for support. Rock your hips from side to side.



The Birth Dance

Place your arms around the neck and shoulders of your birthing partner as if slow dancing and gently sway and rock from side to side which can be helpful during a contraction. This is also a great way to rest when a contraction is over



Kneeling in the birthing pool

Lean forward in the water resting your head against the side of the pool to provide more space in the pelvis and allow you to rest after contractions.



Rest and side lying - Relieve pressure

Particularly beneficial during the early stages that may go on for some time and equally after each contraction. Side lying on your left side is a good position for this and by placing some pillows or a peanut ball between your legs you will keep the bones of the pelvis open and relieve pressure on the pelvic floor.

MOVEMENT

Checklist for Labour

What are the different movements and positions which will support the birthing process and help me to feel comfortable and in control?

All fours

☐

Use of the birthing ball

☐

Lunging

☐

Sitting

☐

Squatting*

☐

Birth Dance

☐

Standing

☐

Hip circles

☐

Figures of 8

☐

Swaying/rocking side to side

☐

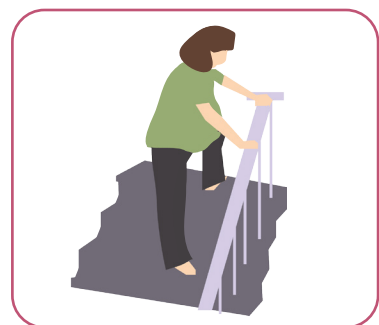
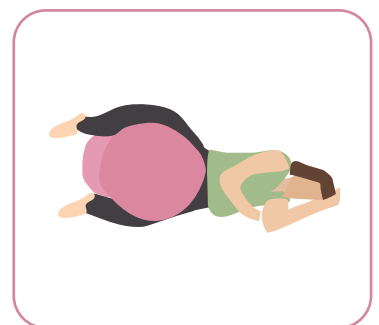
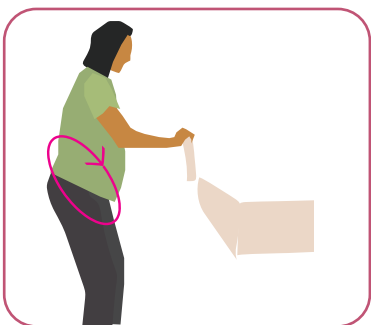
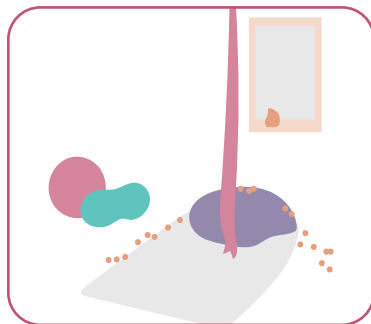
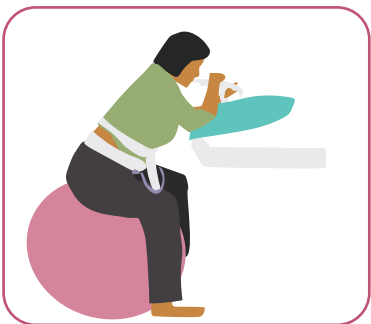
Use of chair/beanbags

☐

Rest & side lying

☐

*Deep squatting is not recommended if your baby is in a breech position after 34 weeks of pregnancy. For more information please see page 45.



Movement & Positions

What can I do during pregnancy to help my baby into a good position for birth?

Why is it so beneficial to be active in labour?

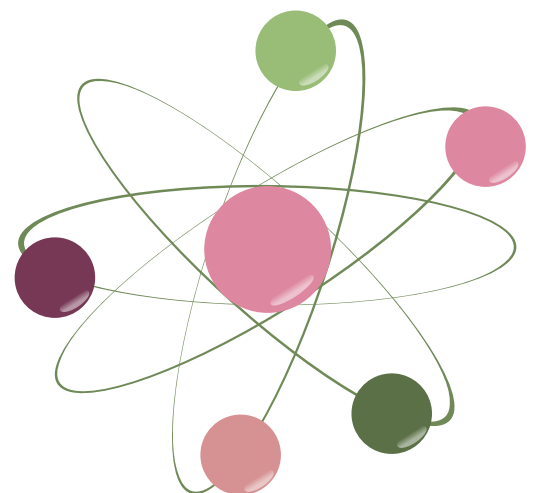
What can I do to rest during labour?

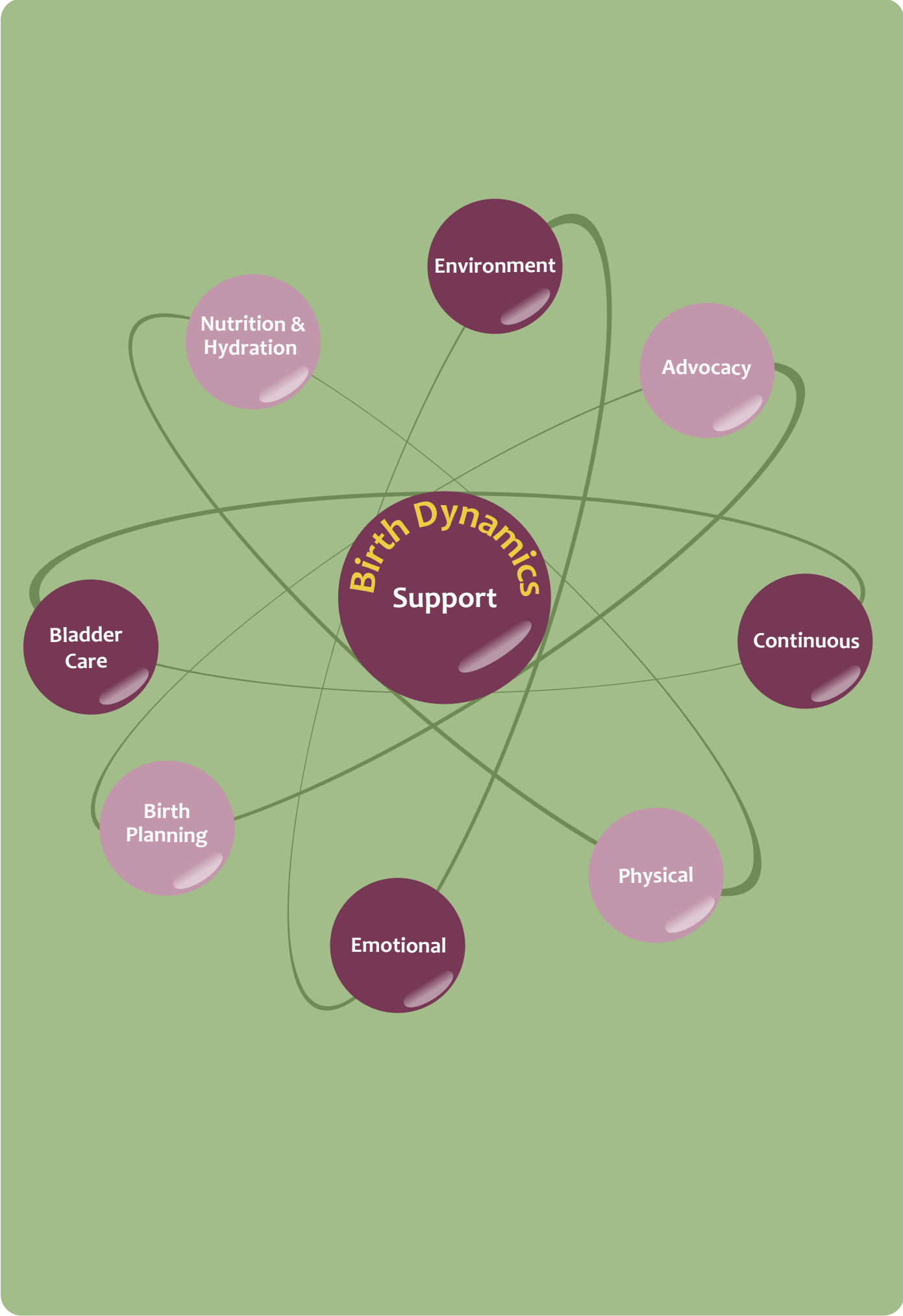


What positions are helpful in active labour either at home or in the hospital?

What positions are helpful in the second or pushing stage of labour?

How can my birthing partner help me use positions and movement during the birth?





Support

Research has shown that women who have continuous support in labour, have better outcomes, with lower rates of intervention, shorter labours and less use of pharmacological pain relief. Women who have continuous support in labour are more satisfied with their birthing experience.

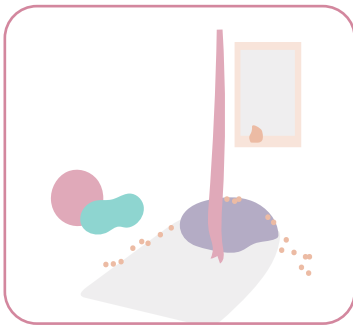


Support in labour can come from different people including your birthing partner, your midwife, your doctor and your team. Your birthing partner could be your life long partner, your Mum, your close friend, your midwife or other birth support worker.

Module 5 - Support

The Role of The Birthing Partner

The role of the birthing partner is working as an advocate for the labouring woman, working with pain, promoting her oxytocin levels and minimising her stress levels. This is achieved by the use of actions and techniques which are supportive for the birthing woman through both physical and emotional support.



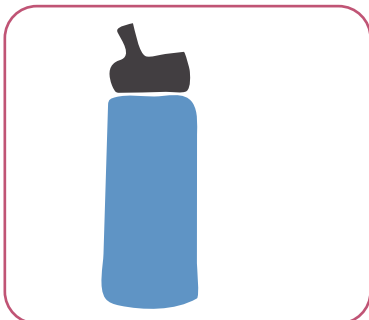
Creating the Birth Environment



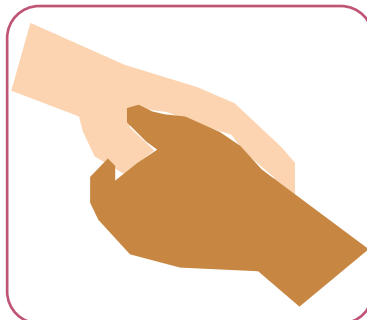
Changing Positions



Advocacy



Nutrition and Hydration



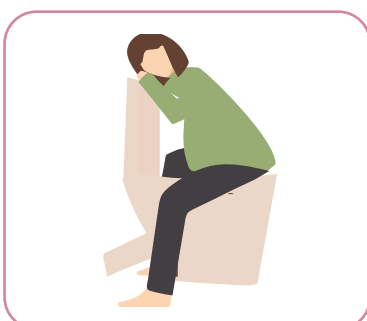
Acupressure



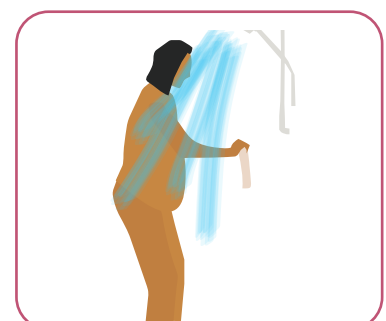
Massage



Positive Affirmations



Bladder Care



Hydrotherapy

What can I do as a birthing partner?

Create and protect the birth environment and conditions that promote calmness and relaxation. You can begin this process during pregnancy and continue it all the way through labour, birth and into the postpartum period.

Have a good understanding of the birth process, the role of hormones and what you can do as a birthing partner to enhance this process.

Discuss birth preferences a few weeks before labour.

Discuss birth preferences with your caregivers on arrival to hospital.

Practise different positions, breathing and massage in pregnancy and throughout labour and birth.

Keep calm and relaxed yourself by using relaxation techniques such as rhythmic breathing.

Keep Mum well nourished and hydrated, which will help contractions to be more effective and help Mum keep energy levels high throughout labour and birth.

Keep yourself well nourished and hydrated, so you can give maximum support to Mum.

Encourage Mum to empty her bladder at least every 1-2 hours throughout labour to make space for the baby to descend down through the pelvis.

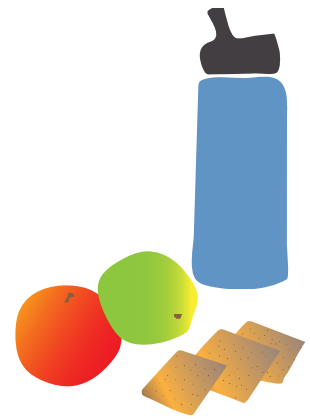
Use positive affirmations and words of encouragement.

Remember you are her advocate.

Module 5 - Support

Nutrition and Hydration

An important role for the birthing partner is to offer snacks and fluids to the labouring woman throughout the birthing process. Labour is like a marathon and it is important to keep all the muscles of the body working to the best of their ability and to give Mum the energy to cross the finish line. The womb is made up of masses of muscle fibres that contract and retract throughout labour. Inadequate nutrition and hydration can cause these muscle fibers to become exhausted and tense causing contractions to become less effective and cause more pain. It is therefore very important to have regular snacks and sips of drinks during the course of labour.



What should I eat as a labouring woman?

In early labour, if you have a good appetite have a good meal and eat plenty of carbohydrates to give you energy for your birthing journey. If you are not feeling hungry try some snacks such as:

Snack ideas:

- Toast/ pitta bread / brown bread with cheese, hummus, butter or jam.
- Jelly sweets / glucose sweets.
- Cereal bars.
- Flapjacks.
- Smoothies.
- Plain biscuits or rice cakes or fig rolls.
- Dates or dried fruit.
- Crackers.

Suitable for women with diabetes:

- Toast/ pitta bread / brown bread with cheese, hummus or butter.
- Small portion of grapes or banana.
- Cereal bars with less than 15grams of carbohydrates per bar.
- Homemade flapjack with no added sugar.
- No added sugar yogurt or glass of milk.
- Plain biscuits, rice cakes or fig rolls only 2 at a time.

As labour progresses you may not feel like eating but it is important to keep yourself hydrated and keep the strong muscles of the womb working effectively. You should drink enough to quench your thirst but there is no need to drink more than this.

It is equally important that as a birthing partner you keep yourself well nourished and hydrated also. The labour process can be long also for you and you will only be able to give quality support to Mum when your own energy levels are high. Make sure to pack plenty of snacks for both Mum and yourself in the birthing bag.

What to drink:

- Water
- Isotonic sports drink. (Not suitable for women with diabetes)
- Flavoured water or cordial. (Choose no added sugar versions for diabetes)
- Avoid fizzy drinks as they can aggravate nausea.

Notes:



NUTRITION & HYDRATION

Checklist for Labour

Water

☐

Toast / brown bread

☐

Flapjacks/Healthy Cereal Bar

☐

Jelly sweets

☐

Isotonic Drinks

☐

Smoothies

☐

Rice cakes

☐

Dates or dried fruit

☐

Plain biscuits and fig rolls

☐

For women attending the Diabetic Clinic:

*NB - if you are attending the diabetic clinic, please discuss with your team what food and drink they would recommend for you during the labour and birth process.

Bladder Care

An important part of your toolkit is the care of your bladder.

Passing urine at least every 1-2 hours will help ensure that your bladder remains empty allowing more space for your baby to descend down through the pelvis. As you navigate your way through the sensations of labour, contractions may reduce your awareness of a full bladder

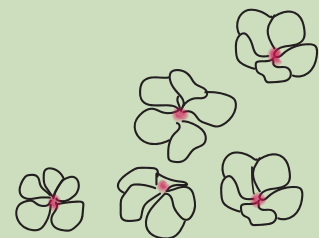
Therefore another important role for the birthing partner is to make sure that Mum takes the time to go and sit on the toilet for a while every 1-2 hours.

Moving to the toilet also means that there is movement and a change of position and some women find it quite comfortable to sit on the toilet for a little while. This will help to open the bones of the pelvis, empty the bladder and encourage the descent of the baby. Try sitting backwards on the toilet for a little while with a pillow in front of you and positive affirmations placed on the wall.



Don't forget to dress up the toilet & bathroom spaces also with tea lights & affirmations both at home and in the hospital environment.

Notes:



Checklist for Labour

As a birth partner how can I give the best support possible to Mum throughout her birthing journey?

There are many times throughout the birthing process when all that is needed is for you to be there, to be still, to be silent and to listen. The simple act of being present is comfort in itself.

Other ways to support mum include:

Physical Support:

Create & maintain an optimal birth environment

☐

Assist in changing positions

☐

Massage

☐

Rhythmic breathing

☐

Nutrition and hydration

☐

Bladder care

☐

Acupressure*

☐

Hydrotherapy

☐

Emotional support:

Reassurance

☐

Positive affirmations

☐

Visualisations

☐

Hypnobirthing

☐

Relaxation Scripts

☐

Advocating

☐

*NB - Acupressure is not recommended before 37 weeks. If practising after 37 weeks use light touch only until the birth. Please refer to your team if you have any underlying medical conditions or complications of pregnancy before use.

Create your own positive affirmations & visualisations:



Support in Labour

What can I do during pregnancy as a support person or birthing partner to help Mum in preparation for childbirth?

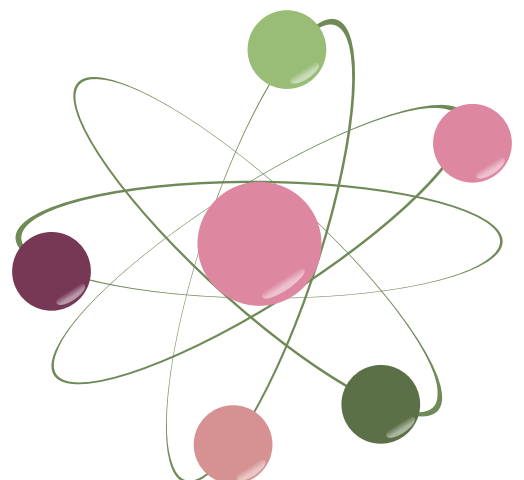
As a birth partner, how can I support Mum in early labour?

Checklist

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As a birthing partner how can I support Mum when she moves from the home environment to the hospital environment?

How as a birth partner can I support Mum in the postpartum period and in the transition to new motherhood?



Environment Page 14-23

During pregnancy, begin to think about creating a calm environment in your home in which you and your birthing partner can take time out to relax, unwind, de-stress, stimulate the release of oxytocin and endorphins and connect with your baby.

- Gather some salt lamps, battery operated tea-lights, LED candles, fairy lights and any form of lighting that you enjoy and which helps you to relax.
- Create playlists of music that you love, that helps you to feel happy and calm and start introducing these sounds to your growing baby inside your womb. From the second trimester of pregnancy your baby will begin to recognise different sounds: your heartbeat, familiar voices and music. Gentle sounds and a calm environment will have a hugely positive effect on your baby's emotional well-being inside your womb, helping them to feel safe and secure. These soundscapes will go on to help calm you and your baby during your birthing journey and in the new environment of life outside the womb.
- Create an undisturbed space for a little while each evening, turning off phones and screens to avoid distractions.
- Collect what you will need in labour and familiarise yourselves with their use each evening.

These may include:

- Birthing ball, bean bag, cushions
- Relaxation scripts
- Visualisations
- Positive affirmations
- Massage oils
- Essential oils and steam diffuser or oil sticks*

*Only use oils that are safe to use in pregnancy and contact an accredited aromatherapist for advice about labour and birth.

Relaxation Techniques Page 24-43

We recommend that you start to practise your relaxation techniques as early as possible during your pregnancy in order to get maximum benefit from their use. The techniques can be used all the way through pregnancy.

- Positive birth stories and affirmations are essential from early pregnancy in order to train your mind to be prepared for a positive birth experience and to believe in yourself that

YOU CAN DO IT!!!

- Labour and birth are not easy but will be worth it. Understanding how your body works and what you can do to optimise the birth process using all of your most accessible tools - Breath, Movement, Touch, Sound, Light & Smell - will help you to manage the intensity and power of labour and enable you to feel more in control if things become challenging.
- Pin up positive affirmations around your home and in your workplace from early in pregnancy and read them at every opportunity.
- Practise your breath work for 15 minutes every evening before bed in your quiet undisturbed space with low lighting and relaxing music.
- At the same time listen to your birth partner reading a relaxation script or suggesting visualisations (or use an audio device).
- Introduce some gentle massage, learning what sensations you like and are comfortable with and as you do so practise your breath work and visualisations.
- Start introducing the sensations of touch and sound to your baby by massaging your abdomen and talking gently to your baby as you listen to some relaxing music.

Movement & Exercises Page 44-57

Maintaining regular exercise is essential during pregnancy in order to be fit and healthy for labour. Staying mobile during pregnancy will help to keep the pelvic ligaments balanced, and relax any build-up of tension. A balanced pelvis will encourage optimal fetal positioning making the birth easier for both you and your baby.

There are a number of exercises you can perform during pregnancy to assist this process.

- Pregnancy yoga
- Walking
- Swimming (front crawl or breast stroke)
- Using the birthing ball
- Use Upright, Forward and Open positions
- Make sure you are comfortable and don't overstretch
- Sleep on your left side as much as possible
- Perform your pelvic floor exercises throughout pregnancy
- Practise perineal massage regularly from 34 weeks

There are some movements and positions to be avoided:

- Minimise time lying back with your feet up such as on the couch
- Avoid wearing high heels as much as possible

Consult your team if you have any discomfort or concerns during your pregnancy.

For more information on exercise during pregnancy, including pelvic floor exercises and perineal massage, please visit <https://www.coombe.ie/physiotherapy>

*If your baby is in a breech position at 34 weeks of pregnancy please refer to www.spinningbabies.com for exercises that may be helpful and those to be avoided.

Support During Pregnancy Page 58-69

As a support/birthing partner there are a number of ways you can support the pregnant woman throughout pregnancy, and help prepare for labour and birth. The more preparation you do in advance the more confident you will feel once labour begins.

- Only listen to positive birth stories and watch positive birth videos
- Prepare and maintain a calm environment during pregnancy where together you can relax, connect with your baby and practise for labour
- Attend an antenatal course
- Discuss your wishes for labour and birth together
- Prepare your birth plan together
- Write, read and record relaxation scripts
- Practice relaxation techniques inclusive of breathing, massage and relaxation scripts regularly together
- Read positive affirmations for birth
- Stock the fridge
- Cook and eat healthy food during pregnancy www.coombe.ie/nutrition-dietetics
- Prepare snacks and drinks for labour for both of you
- Have contact numbers for the hospital to hand
- Learn to recognise the signs of labour
- Know when it is advisable to come to the hospital.

Please contact the hospital if you have any concerns during your pregnancy or labour:

Before 23 weeks, main switch:
(01) 408 5200

After 23 weeks, assessment unit:
(01) 408 5643
(01) 408 5728

Bringing it All Together - Moving Through the Stages of Labour

When to call your team / assessment unit (01) 408 5200/ (01) 408 5643/ (01) 408 5728

- If you have any bleeding in pregnancy
- If you have any visual disturbances
- If you have bad headaches
- If you have any itching
- If you have any sudden onset of swelling
- If you are not feeling well
- If you feel your baby's movements are less than normal for you or there is a distinct change in the pattern of your baby's movements
- If your waters break (this could be a trickle or a gush)
- If you have any unusual discharge including brown, green or blood-stained
- If you think you are in labour

For more information please see our video on concerns in pregnancy at: <https://www.coombe.ie/parent-education-pregnancy>

WHEN TO COME TO HOSPITAL FOR BIRTH

Please discuss with your team at your antenatal clinic when they would recommend that you come to hospital for the birth of your baby. For some it will be advisable to stay at home in early labour and transfer to the hospital once labour has established and you are in active labour. For others, it may be recommended that you come to the hospital if there are any signs of labour at all or you are in early labour.

Every woman is different and it is VERY important that you seek clarity from your team as to what they would recommend for you.

For more information on when to come in please see our video on 'signs of labour' at <https://www.coombe.ie/parent-education-labour-birth>

Some signs that labour may be starting

A show or the loss of the mucus plug

As the cervix starts to soften the mucus plug which seals the neck of the womb during pregnancy may be released. This may occur days before the other signs or not until progressive contractions have begun.

Waters breaking

This may be a small trickle of fluid that leaks intermittently or it may be a gush of fluid that keeps leaking. Please contact the hospital if your waters break or if you are unsure. The normal colour of the waters is clear or milky. If they are brown, green or blood-stained please come straight to the hospital.

Lower backache

A vague nagging backache which causes you to be restless and to keep changing position. It is different from fatigue-related backache that is common during pregnancy.

The onset of contractions

Contractions are the only definite sign that labour has started.

In early labour contractions may be regular or irregular with varying frequency and duration and are usually mild to moderate in intensity. They usually last 15-30 seconds in length and may be 5-30 minutes apart. They may feel like crampy period-like pains, which gradually become more intense.

As labour progresses contractions continue to intensify becoming longer, stronger and closer together and begin to form a regular pattern.

Contractions in active labour consistently average 45 seconds to one minute in length, occur four or fewer minutes apart and feel very strong and powerful.

Contractions in early and active labour can be felt in the abdomen or back or both.

For more information please see our video on 'signs of labour' at <https://www.coombe.ie/parent-education-labour-birth>

The Stages of Labour

Labour is a gradual series of changes and shifts in a woman's body that many experience as one continuum or long journey which gradually intensifies. How labour starts and the length of each stage for one person may be completely different for another. Normal labours may be short or long, they may be painful or hardly painful, they may occur after a high-risk or low-risk pregnancy. There are many variations.

First Stage - Early Labour

Early labour is when the cervix or neck of the womb slowly but progressively softens, shortens, thins, moves forward and opens to about 3cms. This phase of labour can last for a number of hours or days when these variable changes in the cervix and progression of dilatation is generally slower than in active labour

Contractions in early labour may be regular or irregular with varying frequency and duration and are usually mild to moderate in intensity. They usually last 15-30 seconds in length and may be 5-30 minutes apart. Carry on with normal daily activities unless otherwise advised, getting as much rest as possible. When the time feels right begin to dip into your labour toolkit and establish your rhythm for birth.

First Stage - Active Labour

In active or established labour the cervix continues to thin and open from about 3-4cms to 10cms, in the presence of strong regular contractions and the baby's head descends into the pelvis. The active first stage of labour usually lasts anything from 6-12 hours when there is a substantial degree of cervical effacement and more rapid cervical dilatation.

As labour progresses contractions become longer, stronger and closer together and begin to form a regular pattern. They consistently average one minute in length, occur four or fewer minutes apart and feel very strong and powerful. Following your instincts, establishing your rhythm and ritual for birth and working with the sensations of pain using your labour toolkit during this time, will help you to navigate the intensity of childbirth.

Transition

Transition is the bridge between the first and second stage of labour when the cervix dilates from about 8cms to 10cms when the womb is fully open. Transition is a very intense part of labour in which there is a powerful change in hormonal activity and in the nature of contractions. The transition phase, on average, lasts about 30 minutes but may be of varying length.

Contractions during transition may get closer together with short breaks between and feel as if they are coming in waves on top of each other. The sensation of contractions during transition may feel different and more like an intense pressure in your back passage. Transition can be a very challenging time for women and you may feel restless, tense, overwhelmed and irritable. You may vomit, tremble and feel hot and cold and out of control and it is a time when you will need to pull everything out of your labour toolkit. Changing positions, moving to the toilet or shower and focusing on breath work can really help you to cope with the challenges of this phase.

Second Stage

The second stage of labour is the time from when the cervix is fully open to the birth of your baby. During this phase the baby descends into the birth canal and rotates. As the baby's head crowns the perineum stretches and pulls back over the baby's head. The baby's head is born and rotates followed by the shoulders and the rest of the body. The second stage of labour can last anything from 15 minutes to 3 hours.

As the cervix reaches near full dilatation, there is often a lull in contractions. This is referred to as the latent phase of the second stage. During this time the baby moves down by passive descent and you may have time to rest and tank up on energy prior to the pushing phase. As the baby moves further down the birth canal, strong contractions usually resume and you will feel a strong urge to push with each contraction. The baby moves down with each push and slips back a little between pushes until the head crowns. At this point it is important to listen and work in close partnership with your caregivers as you birth your baby onto your naked chest and into skin to skin contact.

Third Stage

The placenta separates from the wall of the womb. After 1-3 minutes the baby's umbilical cord is cut and clamped to allow for optimal cord clamping and blood flow back from the placenta to the baby. Early connections between the new mother and her baby commence in skin to skin contact.

The third stage of labour usually lasts anything from 5-30 minutes. The mother and baby should remain in undisturbed skin to skin contact for as long as possible after birth to allow for the smooth transition to new motherhood and to lay the important foundations of secure attachment. For more information on the stages of labour please view our video at <https://www.coombe.ie/parent-education-labour-birth>

Bringing it All Together - Moving Through the Stages of Labour

Early Labour

The Birth Environment

Enjoy natural light & nature where possible as this stimulates the body's natural biorhythms.

Then when the time is right:

- Use low warm lighting such as salt lamps, battery-operated tea-lights and LED candles
- Listen to relaxation music
- Use positive affirmations
- Make sure you have access to labour aids such as a birthing ball, pillows, mat, step, TENS machine
- Keep labour as undisturbed as possible using gentle voices and phones on silent
- Have the contact details of the hospital close to hand

If you have any questions or concerns during labour please contact the assessment unit on (01) 4085643 or (01) 408 5728

Activities

- If you are at home in early labour continue with your daily activities where possible while remembering to rest along the way
- Go for a walk if you feel up to it
- Cook a meal, snack and take sips of water to keep energy levels up.
- Visit <https://www.coombe.ie/nutrition-dietetics>
- Watch light-hearted movies
- Conserve energy by resting
- Be patient and try not to get too preoccupied with timing contractions at this stage
- When you feel it would be helpful, start using your toolkit during contractions, focusing on your breathing and other relaxation techniques and finding your rhythm for birth
- If you feel it would be helpful to you, start to time contractions as they increase in duration and frequency and form a regular pattern
- **Follow the advice of your team as to when it would be appropriate for you to go into hospital. For some that will be in active labour and for others it will be in early labour.**

Contact the hospital if you have any queries or concerns.

Relaxation and Comfort

- Take a warm bath or shower
- Breathe slowly and steadily through contractions
- Use massage & counter pressure
- Listen to some relaxation scripts
- Use visualisations
- Use hypnobirthing techniques
- Use acupressure (See page 36)
- Consider Aromatherapy (See page 18)
- TENS machine

Movement and Positions

- Upright Forward and Open Positions
- Walking
- Squats (if your baby's head is down) and Lunges during contractions
- All fours & pelvic tilts
- Birthing Ball
- Rest lying on your left side with pillows/ peanut ball between your knees
- Swaying and rocking
- Birth dance
- Rhythmic movements

Active Labour or Established Labour

The Birth Environment

- On arrival to your birthing room make sure it is as comfortable as possible for you. Your birthing partner can be very helpful in establishing the setting.
- Use battery-operated tea-lights, a salt lamp and LED candles to provide low, warm lighting
- Listen to relaxation music on your portable device
- Pin up your positive affirmations around your birthing room and shower room
- Keep labour as undisturbed as possible using gentle voices, phones on silent and closed doors.



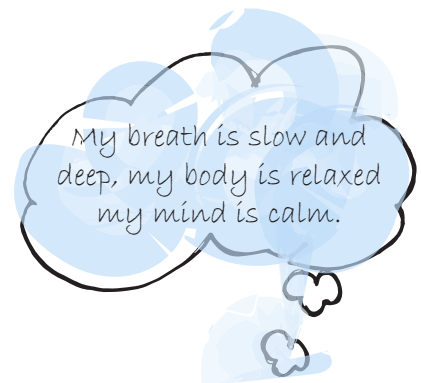
Activities

As contractions begin to increase in frequency and duration you can start to time them.

Follow the advice of your team as to when it would be appropriate for you to come into the hospital.

On transfer to the hospital continue to use your toolkit in the car and assessment unit, listening to positive affirmations and relaxation tracks on your portable device and focus on your breathing. Use a TENS machine if you choose to on the journey.

Have your birth plan to hand on arrival and discuss your birth preferences with your midwife.



Relaxation and Comfort

- Use the birthing pool or shower
- Keep focused on your breathing during contractions
- Use massage and counterpressure
- Listen to relaxation scripts
- Use visualisations
- Use hypnobirthing techniques
- Use acupressure (see page 36)
- Use a TENS machine
- Use calming vocalisations such as moans and sighs

Movement and Positions

- Upright, Forward and Open positions
- Walking
- Squats (if your baby's head is down) and lunges during contractions
- All fours and pelvic tilts
- Birthing ball
- Rest lying on your left side with pillows/ peanut ball between your knees
- Swaying and rocking
- Birth dance
- Rhythmic movements

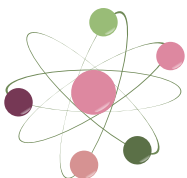
Birth Partner Support in Labour

Early Labour

- Establish and maintain a quiet calm environment
- Have the bags and a copy of the birth plan ready
- Encourage normal non-strenuous activities during the day and rest at night if possible
- Have a meal together to keep both your energy levels up
- Listen to the labouring woman for cues as to what she might need
- Offer physical and emotional support using your toolkit
- As contractions become more challenging encourage relaxation, visualisations and slow breathing, counting breaths in and out and releasing tension on the outward breath
- Remind her of her coping techniques when she needs grounding
- Encourage movement
- Encourage her to go to the toilet every 1-2 hours
- Be patient and do not get over-excited or pre-occupied with the contractions whilst they are irregular and have no real pattern
- Start to time contractions once they are getting longer, stronger and closer together and start to form a regular pattern
- Be alert to labour advancing and prepare to leave for the hospital
- Have contact details of the hospital to hand

Active Labour

- On arrival to your birthing room make sure it is comfortable and try to maintain quiet peaceful conditions throughout the birthing journey
- Discuss the birth plan with your caregivers
- If there is a change of caregiver at any point, discuss the birth plan with them on arrival.
- Offer sips of water and snacks to the labouring woman throughout labour
- Make sure to snack and keep well hydrated yourself
- Offer words of encouragement and support throughout
- Mop her brow from time to time with a cool compress or facecloth
- Encourage her to go to the toilet every 1-2 hours
- Focus on the present and not on the hours to come
- Don't ask questions during a contraction
- Encourage movement
- Use positive language
- Give her your total undivided attention during every contraction
- Offer a sip of water and encourage rest after each contraction
- Remember, there are many times during labour when all that is needed is to be there, to be silent, to be still and to be listening



Using your toolkit if your pathway for labour or birth changes course

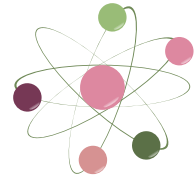
There are times during pregnancy & labour when intervention may be necessary for the wellbeing of either the mother or the baby and it is important that you are also prepared for change and know how you can adapt your toolkit to help you navigate uncharted landscapes and any associated challenges.

Induction of Labour

If induction of labour is recommended for you it is important that:

1. You understand the reason why.
2. You have discussed with your team the benefits and associated risks.
3. You understand the process.
4. You understand the timeframe.
5. You use your toolkit for labour throughout the whole process.

Please visit: <https://www.coombe.ie/parent-education-labour-birth>



If you are admitted to one of the antenatal wards to start an induction of labour process, it could be a number of days until you move to your birthing room. It is therefore important to know how you can adapt your toolkit for this environment as it can play a big part in assisting you to keep relaxed and comfortable and in optimising the induction of labour process.

- Bring your tea lights/ LED candles/ salt lamp for use beside your bedside.
- Use your music and headphones to distract you and help you to relax.
- Listen to your prerecorded relaxation scripts and positive affirmations.
- Mobilise using the hospital hall, stairs and landings (where appropriate), your birthing ball or ballet bars in the rooms.
- Make sure to empty your bladder regularly.
- Eat and drink the recommended food and drink to keep your energy levels up. (See page 62)
- Rest when you need to lying on your left side with some pillows between your knees.

On transfer to your birthing suite, establish an optimal environment for birth (See page 15). Your birthing partner could be very helpful in taking responsibility for this. Discuss your birth preferences with your midwife and team.

Try to remain mobile for as long as possible, using your toolkit, focusing on your breathing, listening to your scripts/affirmations and gentle music. Ask if the wireless continuous fetal monitoring system is available which will help in keeping your movement unrestricted.

Assisted and Caesarean Birth

If your pathway for birth changes course during labour it can be challenging for both you and your birthing partner. Effective communication between you and your caregivers is of paramount importance in order that you remain central to your birthing experience. Try to work with your birthing partner through any challenges, keeping the environment calm, focusing on your breathing & positive affirmations.

Remember, although intervention has been recommended for you, it is still equally important to use your toolkit throughout your birthing journey, helping to optimise physiology and make it as positive experience as possible for you. Please visit: <https://www.coombe.ie/parent-education-labour-birth> for more information on assisted and caesarean birth.

Keep focused, stay positive and with your toolkit - YOU CAN DO IT!

Acknowledgments

We would like to extend a sincere thank you to:

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Our precious friends and colleagues at the Coombe Hospital for their support & encouragement in the development of this programme and in all that we do.

Above all we would like to extend a heartfelt thank you to the women and families we are so privileged to care for and who are the inspiration for all that we do.

THIS IS FOR YOU



A LEAN Healthcare Quality Improvement Project supported by The Coombe Women & Infants University Hospital.

Copyright © 2021 by **Megan Sheppard**, Clinical Midwife Manager 2 Dept. of Parent Education, IBCLC, Active Birth Instructor; **Ciara Whelan**, Midwife, Active Birth & Prenatal Yoga Instructor; **Fidelma McSweeney**, Assistant Director of Midwifery & Nursing.

Graphic Design & Illustrations by Marketing Manager **Aoife Walsh**.

This brings us to the end of your Birth Dynamics workbook. It is now of great importance that you prepare for childbirth by:

- Attending an antenatal education course at the Coombe Hospital, inclusive of a Birth Dynamics class.
- Revising over the theoretical components of each module.
- Reviewing the video “Birth Dynamics a Toolkit for Labour” available on the hospital website.
- Practising your relaxation techniques over and over again until they are second nature to you.
- Practising your positions for labour and birth.
- Following the guidance on Bringing it all Together - Preparation During Pregnancy pg. 70-72.
- Completing the worksheets at the end of each module.

Module 1 The Role of Hormones

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Module 2 Birth Environment

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Module 3 Relaxation

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Module 4 Movement

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Module 5 Support

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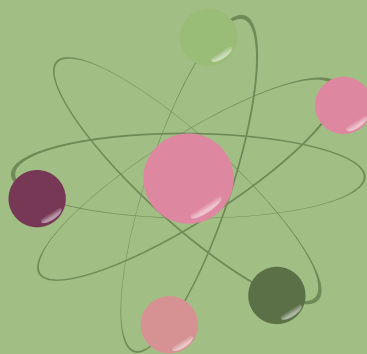
We Wish You All The Best On Your Birthing Journey



To view our website use this QR code or visit www.coombe.ie/birth-dynamics

Most importantly of all take
time to prepare for the greatest
transformation of your life by
resting, relaxing and connecting
with your baby using your most
accessible toolkit:

BREATH, MOVEMENT, SOUND,
TOUCH & LIGHT.



Birth Dynamics 2021 v1

A Toolkit For Labour & Birth

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