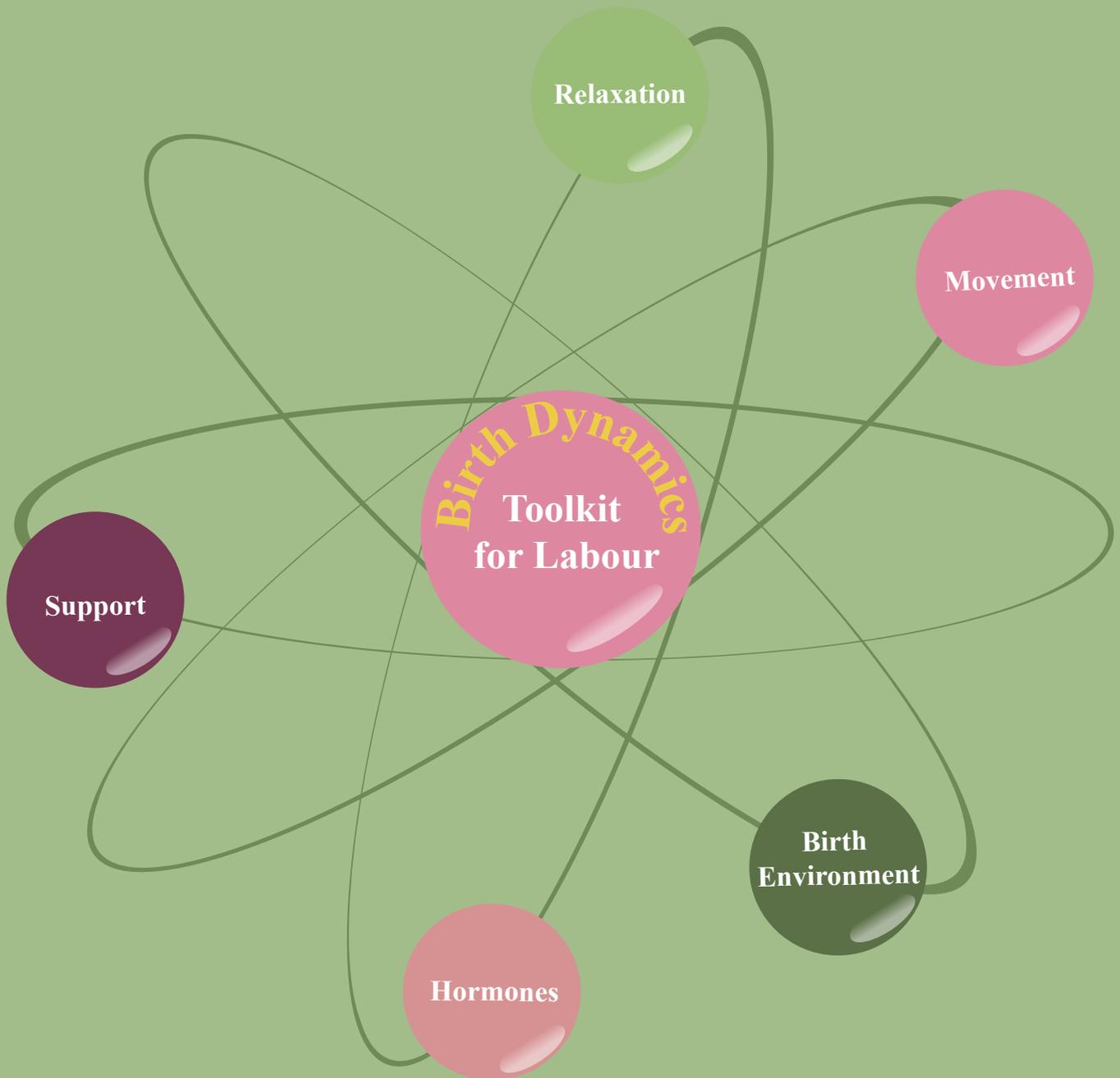


Birth Dynamics[®]

A Toolkit For Labour



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 evidence-based antenatal education developed to support you in labour, optimise physiology and empower you on your birthing journey.

The Birth Dynamics programme is a toolkit for labour for both you, your birthing partner and support team to use throughout labour and birth. It contains techniques and supports that will assist you in keeping comfortable, support the birthing process and help you to feel in control.

The **Birth Dynamics Workbook** is designed to help you engage in preparation for childbirth through education and participative learning. We encourage you to read the material in each module thoroughly in order to gain an understanding of how each part of the labour toolkit can help you. Once you are familiar with the contents, we recommend the use of the accompanying worksheets to help you prepare for your birthing journey.

In order to get maximum benefit from the Birth Dynamics programme, we recommend that you use this manual in conjunction with the video “**Birth Dynamics A Toolkit for Labour**” available on the hospital website and attend a **Birth Dynamics antenatal class** through the Department of Parent Education at the Coombe.

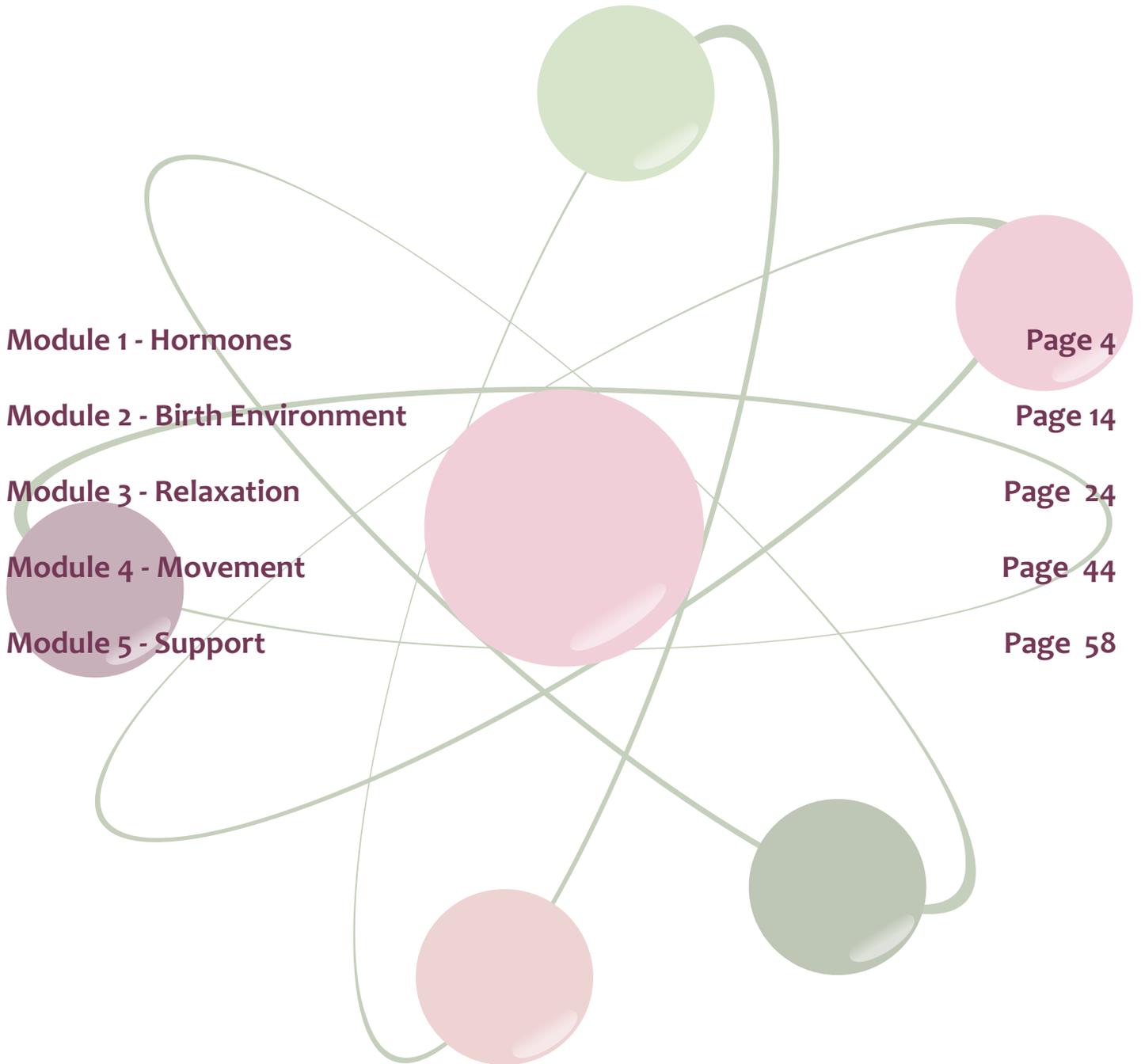


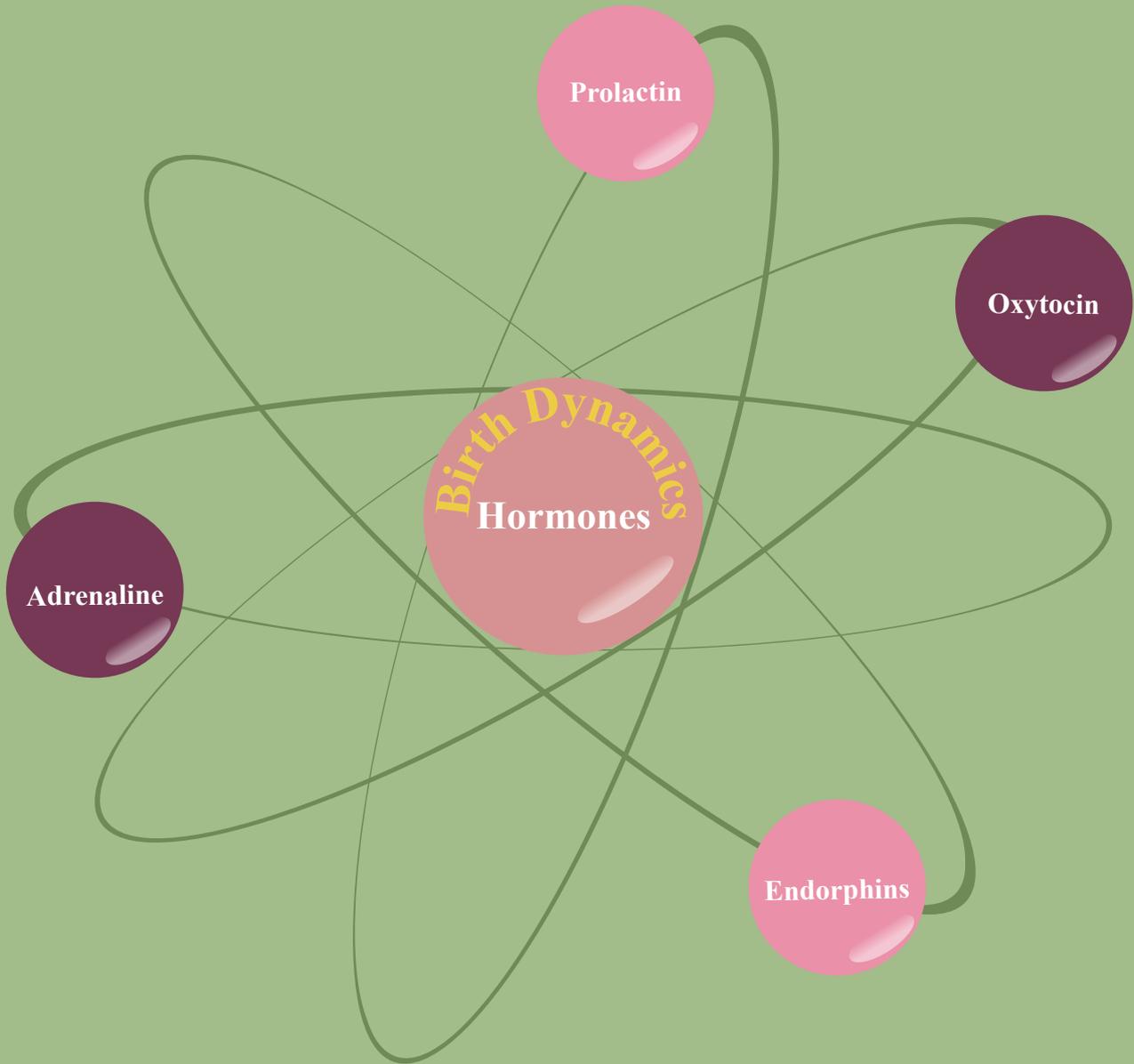
To view our website use this QR code or visit www.coombe.ie/birth-dynamics

Disclaimer

The information in this manual has been developed by The Birth Dynamics Group 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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Understanding the Role of Hormones

Women's bodies have their own wisdom when it comes to labour and giving birth.

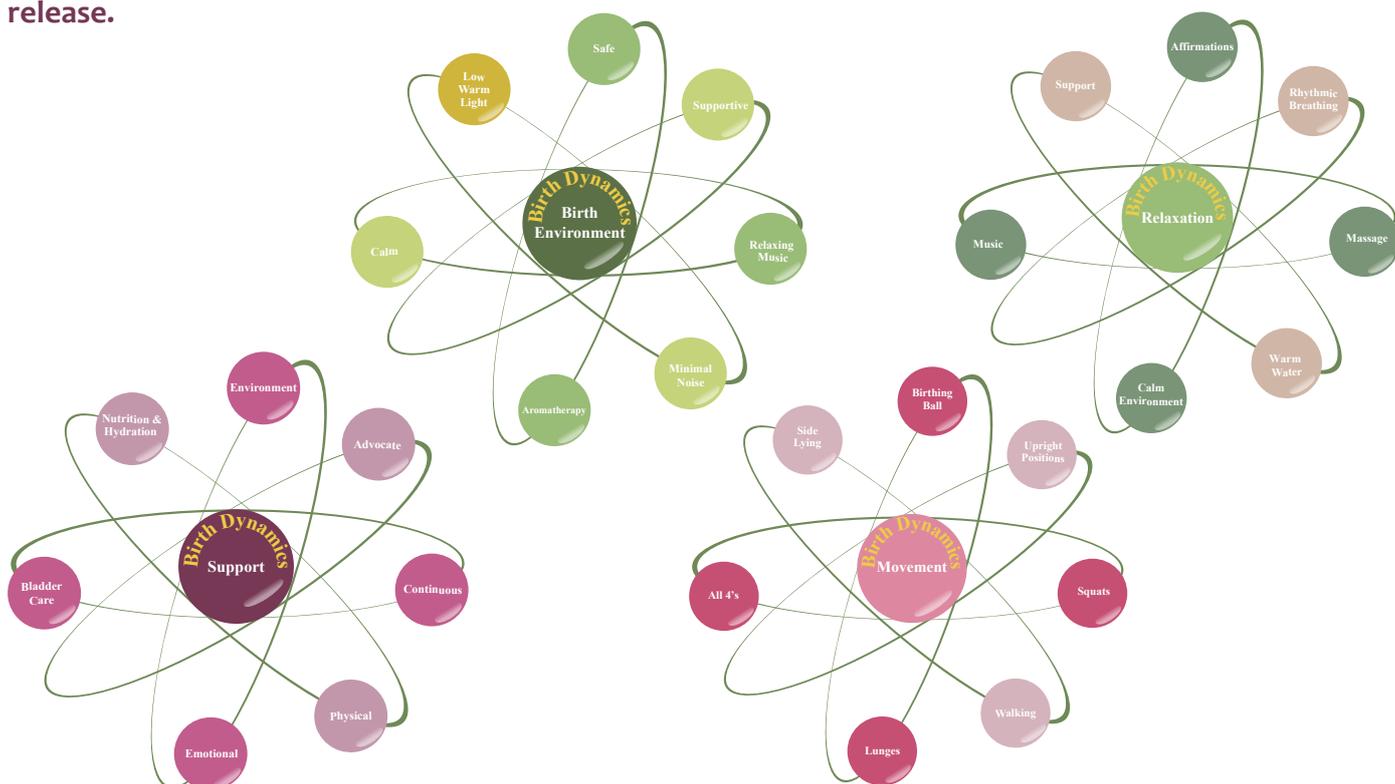
How your body works throughout your birthing journey can be significantly influenced by many forces, one of which is a delicate balance of **hormones**. Optimising hormonal activity throughout labour and birth is instrumental if the transition from pregnancy to birth to new motherhood and lactation is to be smooth.

When hormonal activity is optimal, labour progresses and the labouring mother feels calm and in control. Stimulating a woman's natural hormonal responses to labour helps her to manage the challenges of labour, helps to reduce the pain of contractions and is instrumental in allowing the strong muscles of the uterus work effectively.

There are many hormones involved in the birthing process. These include **Oxytocin, Endorphins** and **Adrenaline**. When the orchestration of these hormones is optimal, the physiology of birth is supported to its greatest.

In contrast, when the balance of hormones is disturbed, contractions become more painful and the process of labour slows down and sometimes even stops. When labour slows down intervention is more likely.

It is absolutely fundamental therefore that in preparation for childbirth you gain a thorough understanding of how your labouring hormones work, and what you can do to stimulate their natural release.



The benefits of optimising hormonal activity:

- Optimises physiology and the birthing process.
- Encourages the spontaneous onset of labour.
- Helps contractions to be effective.
- Help labour to progress.
- Helps you to feel calm and in control.
- Helps you to manage challenging contractions.

What can I do to optimise hormonal activity throughout my birthing journey?

- Prepare for childbirth through education and practice.
- Create optimal conditions for birth.
- Change positions regularly.
- Use relaxation techniques.
- In the presence of a calm and supportive birthing partner by your side at all times.

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

Oxytocin

Oxytocin is a hormone that evokes feelings of love and calmness. 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. The more oxytocin that you produce the more effective your contractions will be in helping labour to progress.

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 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.

Endorphins

Endorphins are your body's own natural painkillers and are released in response to pain. In early labour they are released in small amounts and as labour progresses the levels of endorphins rise and can help you to manage pain, enabling you to enter an altered state of consciousness or become "zoned out". They also help to promote feelings of well being. The release of endorphins is also inhibited by high levels of adrenaline which negatively impacts on a woman's ability to manage pain.

Adrenaline

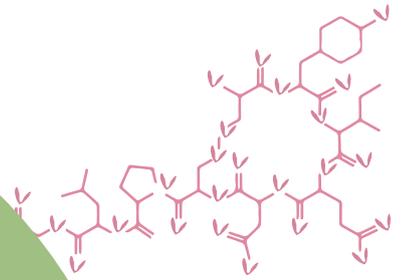
Adrenaline is the hormone produced by your body in times of stress, fear or anxiety, hunger, thirst or cold. High adrenaline levels in labour, which reflect women's fight or flight response to fear or anxiety, inhibit the production of oxytocin thereby slowing down labour or in some instances causing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

The release of noradrenaline 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 highly important, particularly in early labour that you try not to focus on timing and clocks but instead nurture the relaxation side or emotional brain which is involved in the release of oxytocin. The less adrenaline you produce, the more oxytocin and the easier it will be for labour to progress.

Prolactin

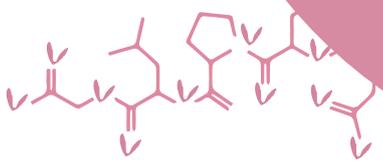
Prolactin is the main hormone of breast milk production and breastfeeding. It also makes the mother very protective of her new baby and means that the mother will put baby's needs first. It helps give new mums patience to nurture her newborn baby.



The more oxytocin you produce the more effective your contractions will be in helping labour to progress.

The more adrenaline you produce, the less oxytocin and the more likely labour is to slow down. By maximising oxytocin levels we help to enhance the labour process, we optimise physiology and a woman's experience of birth.

Nurturing the emotional side of the brain by creating optimal conditions for birth and the use of relaxation techniques will help you to cope with the challenges of labour, help you to feel in control and enhance your experience of birth.



What can I do to maximise the release of the hormone oxytocin throughout my birthing journey?

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

What can I do to minimise the release of the hormone adrenaline during labour and birth?

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

HORMONES

Checklist for Labour

What can I do to optimise hormonal activity which will support the birthing process and help me to feel in control?

Maximise oxytocin and endorphin levels and reduce adrenaline levels by:

Preparing for labour and birth during pregnancy



Creating an optimal birth environment



Minimising interruptions and noise



Moving about freely



Using relaxation techniques



Keeping warm



Keeping well nourished and hydrated



Throughout the following 4 modules of the Birth Dynamics programme, you will learn techniques and supports which will be instrumental in optimising hormonal activity in labour and ultimately your experience of birth.

The Role of Hormones

Preparation for during pregnancy

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

Checklist

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

What can I do in early labour to optimise hormonal activity?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

Why is this so important to the process of labour?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

What can I do in active labour to encourage optimal hormonal activity and help the labour process?

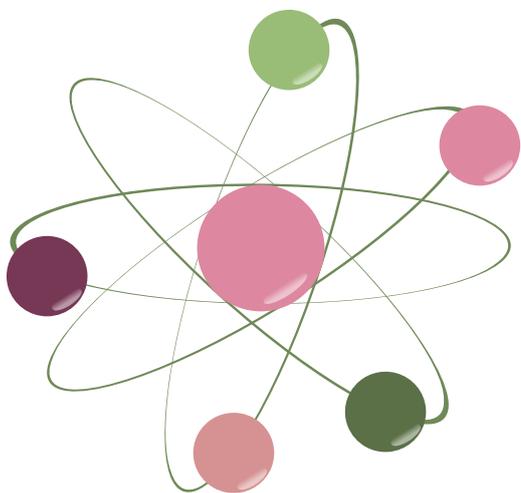
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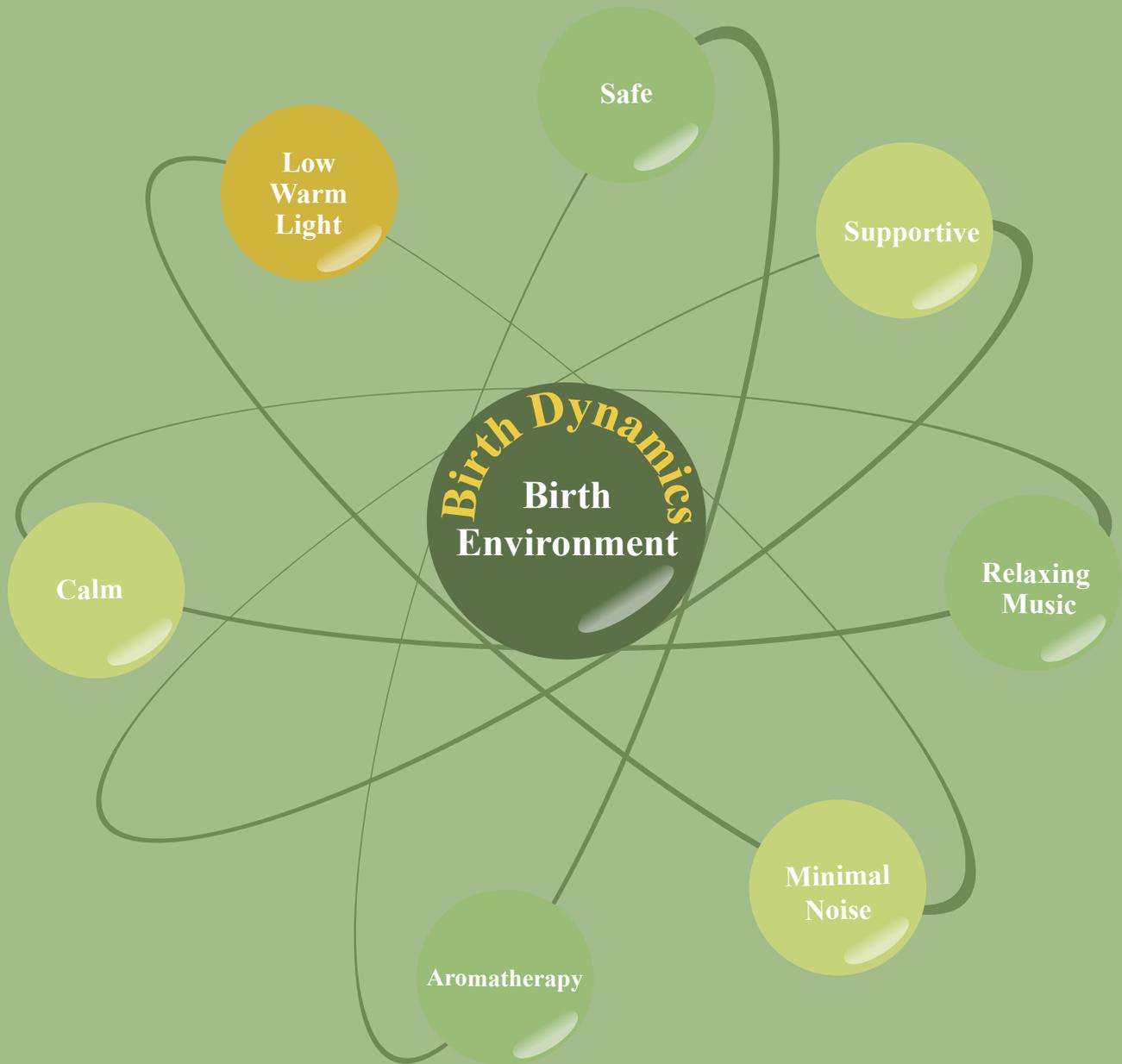
What can I do in the second stage to help me stay calm and in control?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

How can my birthing partner help me through the transition stage?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____





The Birth Environment

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 relaxed during labour and birth.

This will involve keeping the environment calm and protected in the presence of a calm and supportive birthing partner by your side at all times.

When we create a space where a labouring mother feels safe and supported, a space where there are minimal interruptions or disturbances, a space where she is warm, well nourished and hydrated, a space where she can move about freely, a space which is dimly lit and which supports relaxation, a space in which a woman is supported in her choices around birth, we are creating optimal conditions for birth.

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

The benefits of an optimal birth environment:

- Provides women with a sense of control.
- Women feel safe and protected.
- Helps women to relax during labour.
- Enhances hormonal activity which supports the labour process.
- Helps birthing partners to relax.

How can we achieve this?

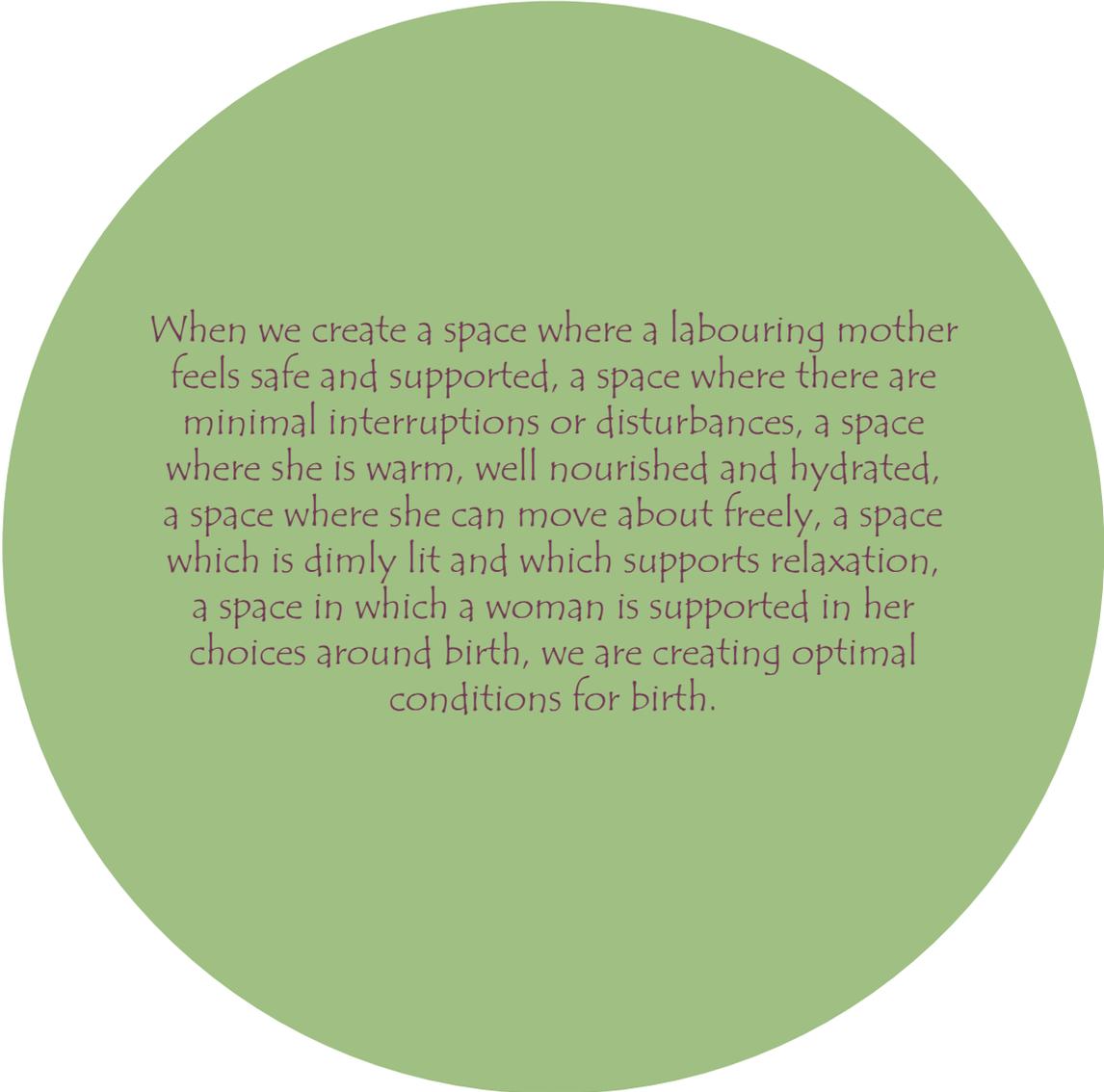
- Physical and emotional support.
- Keep lights low and warm .
- Minimise noise and interruptions.
- Gentle relaxation music.
- Organise your birth space to support movement.
- Provide access to warm water.

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 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.

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 T-lights, prerecorded playlist of music and earphones.**



When we create a space where a labouring mother feels safe and supported, a space where there are minimal interruptions or disturbances, a space where she is warm, well nourished and hydrated, a space where she can move about freely, a space which is dimly lit and which supports relaxation, a space in which a woman is supported in her choices around birth, we are creating optimal conditions for birth.

Creating an Optimal Birth Environment

What can you do to create this type of environment?

Dim the lights and use low warm lighting

Using tea lights, salt lamps and warm table lamps. This will help you to relax and keep calm. Warm red spectrum lighting has also been shown to improve women's oxytocin levels in labour as oppose to bright white clinical lights which 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.



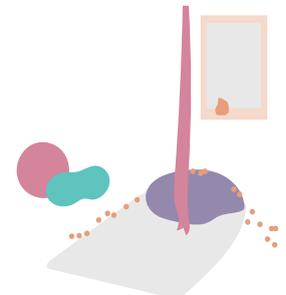
Play some relaxation music

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

Having the space to move about freely and change positions is instrumental in supporting mobility during labour and birth. Women should have access to supports and equipment which assist them in adopting upright positions and having an active birth.



Access to warm water

The use of warm water provides women with a sense of soothing, relaxation and a supportive environment. 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 environment

Women who have continuous support during labour and birth have better outcomes with lower rates of intervention and 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.



The environment is supportive of active birthing

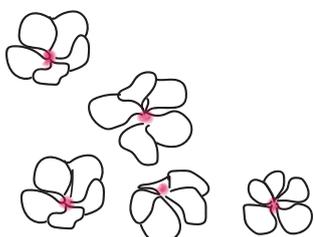
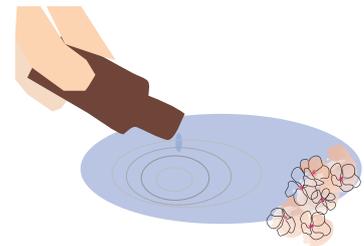
Active Birth refers to 3 key concepts to support a woman throughout her birthing journey: It encourages the use of instinctive upright positions during labour and birth, it stimulates the woman's natural hormone responses and the woman is supported and empowered to make her own choices about birth.



Consider aromatherapy

Aromatherapy has the capacity to lower anxiety and the perception of pain. The oils may be massaged into the skin or inhaled using a steam diffuser or tissue.

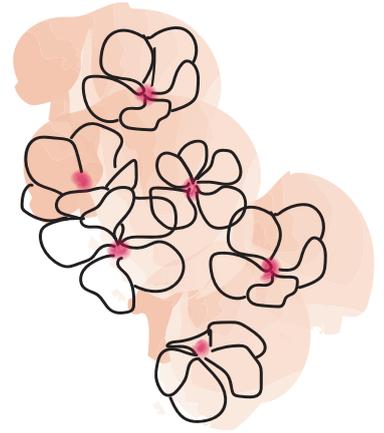
*Essential oils are very powerful and they need to be used carefully. It is important that you only use oils that are safe for pregnancy and labour so please consult a properly accredited Aromatherapist for advice before use.



Aromatherapy

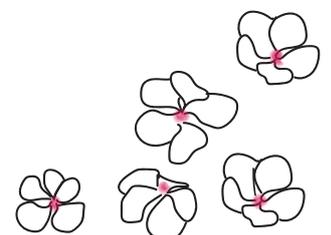
There is a strong link between emotion and smell with pleasing aromas having the capacity to lower anxiety and pain perception. Aromatherapy draws on the healing powers of plants with the use of essential oils to enhance physical and mental wellbeing. The oils may be massaged into the skin, used in a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



Some women find the use of aromatherapy during labour relaxing and calming and certain essential plant oils can be very helpful.

However essential oils are very powerful and they need to be used carefully. It is highly important that you only use oils that are safe for pregnancy and labour so please consult a properly accredited aromatherapist for advice before use.



Module 2 - Birth Environment

Hydrotherapy

Hydrotherapy refers to the use of water in 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.

The benefits of hydrotherapy are:

Provides women with a sense a soothing and a supportive environment. Women perceive it to be helpful for pain relief. The release of oxytocin is promoted through sensory stimulation from showering or water immersion.

When would you use it?

- Warm showers or baths at home in early labour.
- Warm showers in early labour if you are labouring on a antenatal ward.
- Warm showers in your birth suite.
- Birthing Pool in active labour in your birthing suite (suitable for low risk women).



Notes

CHECKLIST FOR BIRTH ENVIRONMENT AT HOME AND IN HOSPITAL

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

Low warm lighting or dimmable lights of your choice eg.LED
t-lights & salt lamps



Minimise noise and interruptions



The use of 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 and 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



Continuous support throughout labour and birth



Where possible have access to nature



The Birth Environment

Preparation during pregnancy

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

Checklist

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

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

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

Why is this so important?

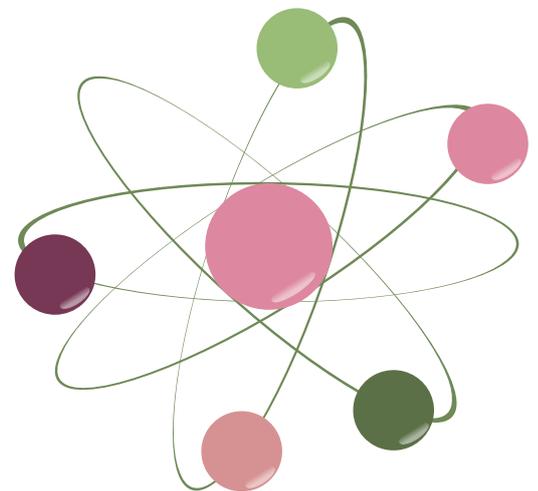
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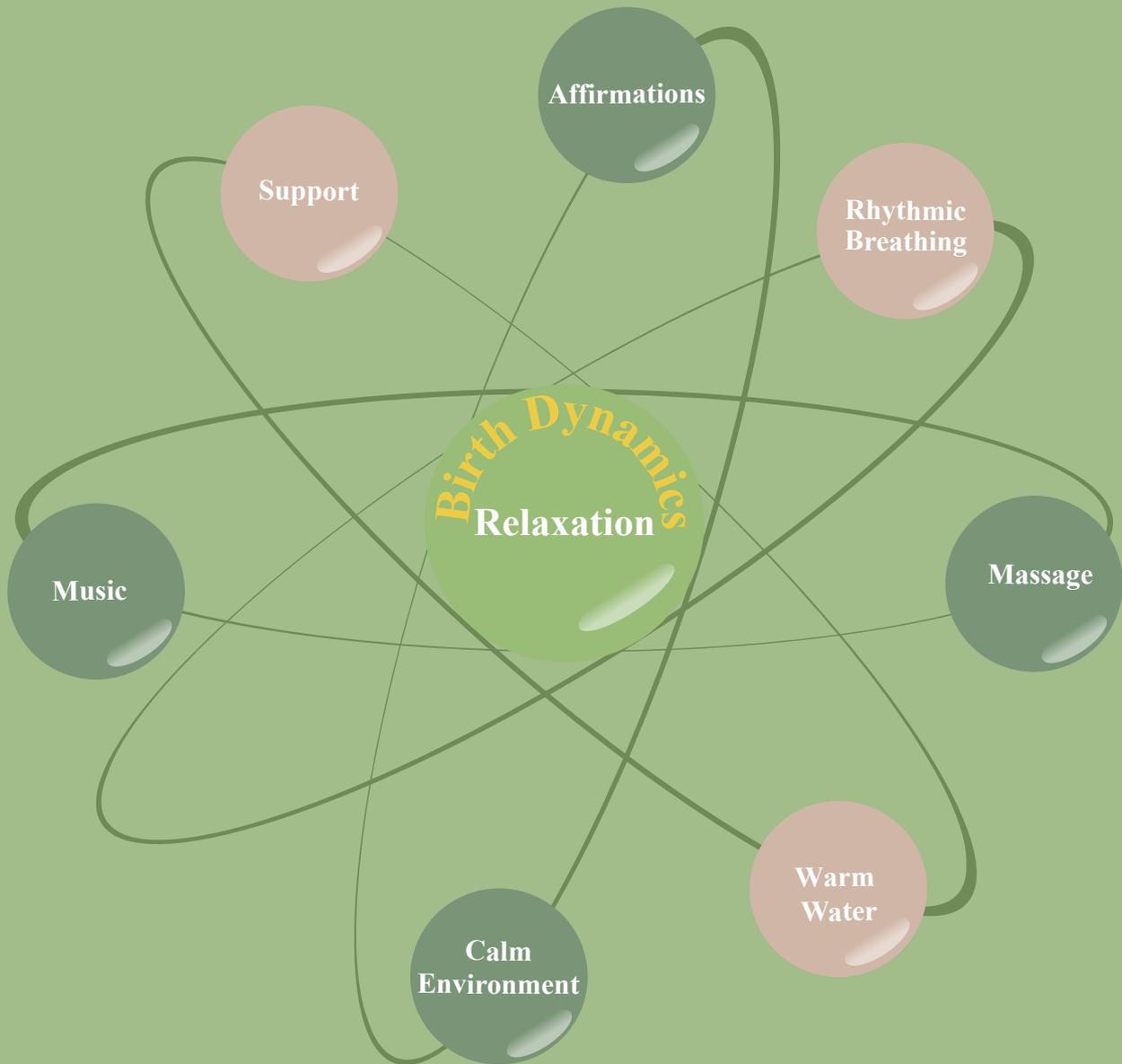
What can I do in active labour when I move from home to the hospital environment to create optimal conditions in the birthing room?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
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7. _____
8. _____

How can my birthing partner protect the birth environment?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____





Relaxation

The use of relaxation techniques can significantly impact your labour and birth in a number of ways.

By encouraging the release of the hormone **oxytocin** it can make contractions more effective thereby shortening your labour. When you feel relaxed and calm it allows for the release of **endorphins** which can help you to manage the pain.

The release of adrenaline is reduced making your muscles work better, making your birth easier. Your confidence in your ability to manage the challenges of birth is increased tenfold.

During your pregnancy you can start using some techniques such as **relaxation scripts, breath work, visualisation, positive affirmations, massage** and **aromatherapy**. These will all help you to relax, to understand the feeling, and bring it with you in your toolkit.

Together with the right **birth environment, support, movement, hydrotherapy** and being well **nourished and hydrated**, it optimises the production of oxytocin and endorphins. This in turn enables your labour to progress and helps to you feel calm and in control.

Benefits of relaxation

- Helps keep oxytocin flowing.
- Reduces the production of adrenaline thus helping labour to progress.
- Helps you to cope with the pain of contractions.
- Promotes a sense of control.
- Relaxes the pelvic floor and releases tension.
- Enhances your experience of labour & birth.

Module 3 - Relaxation

For many people childbirth is something to be afraid of. The media, friends and family and society in general, paint a negative picture of birth.

Regardless of the type of birth you have, it should be a positive experience. **Relaxation** and **feeling confident** plays a major role in helping you to feel in control and be an active participant.

During the **early stages of labour** when contractions are mild and intermittent, go for a walk, watch a movie, cook a nice dinner, have a bath or get a massage from your birth partner. Make sure to **rest** when you can.

Labour is like a marathon so its beneficial to conserve your energy. This could be a good opportunity to **read a relaxation script** and rest. Build your own nest at home, put your phone on silent to minimise disturbances and concentrate on yourself and the fact you will meet your new baby soon.

This will all help the hormone **oxytocin** to flow, reduce adrenaline and move labour into the more active phase.

Relaxation tips for early stages of labour:

- Go for a walk.
- Watch a movie.
- Cook a nice dinner.
- Have a bath.
- Ask your partner for a massage.
- Rest.
- Read a relaxation script.

Your birth partner:

It's important that your **birth partner** is involved, understands and is comfortable with all the actions and techniques in this manual 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**.

As labour progresses and moves into the **active phase** and contractions get more intense, you will need to focus on your **breathing**, keep it slow and steady and use all the tools at your disposal.

Changing positions, having a shower, getting a massage, using your **visualisations** and **positive affirmations** are all vital components in your toolkit that will help you feel relaxed.

The role of your birth partner is to suggest any or all of these relaxation techniques to help you manage the roller coaster of birth.

During your birth you may find your own ways to relax, feel your own rhythm and create your own ritual for birth. You can find yourself overwhelmed by the sensations for birth, by combining your rhythmic breaths with movements such as swaying, rocking or circling your hips you can create your own ritual. This will help you to feel calm relaxed and in control.

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

After a contraction.

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

Module 3 - Relaxation

Breathing for Labour & Birth

Relaxation and breath work are closely intertwined. Our breathing reflects our stage of relaxation or agitation in our day to day lives as well as in labour.

Generally speaking if our breathing is **slow and steady** we are **calm and relaxed**. However when we become tense and anxious our breath tends to become erratic and shallow.

While focusing on your breath during labour and birth cannot take away the pain, it can really help you to manage the intensity of contractions.

Benefits of focusing on your breathing:

- Helps you to feel calm, relaxed and in control.
- Means your thought process is channeled away from any discomfort you may be 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.
- Slow and steady breathing brings extra oxygen to your baby.

During pregnancy, practice your breathing for birth, perhaps using relaxation scripts, visualisations or while having a massage. If you attend pregnancy yoga classes, breathing and relaxation are key components of your practice.

Being aware of your breath, feeling comfortable and confident using your breath for relaxation in pregnancy ensures you will bring this with you for labour and birth.

In **early labour** either at home or in the hospital you will 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 concentrate on your breathing to help you get through each contraction. **Take one contraction at a time**, resting between each one and breathing normally releasing all the tension.

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

Notes

Module 3 - Relaxation

Here are some suggestions for breath work for you to use during labour:

..... Steady breathing in through your nose and out through your mouth.

..... Count in and out during the inhale and exhale, making the out breath last a little longer.

..... Breathe in and moan as you breath 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.

..... Your birthing partner could count your breath in and out.

If in doubt, breathe out

During the birth there will be times where you can be overwhelmed and feel panicked, and if you can, bring your awareness back to your breath keeping it slow and steady. There will be occasions where birth partners will have to be a little bit more assertive in order to help you regulate your breathing.

Belly Breath for Labour

Sitting comfortably, 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 and try and keep your breath slow and steady.

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

Do the same on the next breath....

And the next.....

Then when it is over relax, rest and breathe.

Module 3 - Relaxation

Massage for Labour and Birth

Massage and touch can be really helpful during your 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 all the rest of your toolkit can help you navigate the challenges of birth. It can 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 birth 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. Practicing as part of your relaxation preparation in pregnancy will increase your association of massage with relaxation.

It is really important to practice 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!



It is worth noting that however much you enjoy a massage there may come a time during the birth where you do not want to be touched. That could be in early labour or as labour intensifies. This is perfectly normal. Or 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 your body during your birth, and go with what feels comfortable for you.

In your manual we have demonstrated the positions that are beneficial for labour, for example using the birthing ball, a bean bag, all fours, standing, sitting backwards on a chair and the child's pose position. These are also good positions for receiving a massage.

It is important, that the person giving the massage is also in a comfortable position. If the birthing woman is kneeling, sit on a chair behind her, or if she is standing make sure you balance your weight so that you are comfortable.

Notes

Module 3 - Relaxation

As labour progresses the birthing woman can “zone out” during a contraction and it’s important to reduce disturbances as much as possible.

Work out communication before the birth, for example mum could say “more” or “less” for pressure, “up” or “down”, rather than having to give specific instructions.

Lastly for the birthing partner, don’t worry too much about technique.

Use light strokes, kneading and pressure and make sure you pay attention to her responses to your touch and massage.

Her needs may change during the birth or she may not want to be touched at all. The birthing woman can become overwhelmed by the sensations of birth and may become panicky.

Holding her hand or stroking the inside of her arm may be what she needs to regulate her breathing and relax.

Your support and reassurance is so important to her.

Notes

Shoulders

Place your hands on her shoulders, which will help to drop the shoulders away from the ears. Encourage her to exhale and relax the shoulders. Imagine you are absorbing all of her tension. You could either keep your hands there or using light strokes brush down her arms using a rhythmic action.

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



Back

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

Starting at the neck, sweep the flat of your hand slowly down one side of the 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 could do this in a slow and steady motion helping her to breathe rhythmically.

Using the heel of your hand use firm, circular massage over the lower back, your partner 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 the 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 the sacrum, your partner 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 she is experiencing a lot of back pain.

Place one or two hands over the base of the 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 the woman is standing, kneeling or sitting, place your hands on the hip area and put pressure on the hips squeezing them “in” towards each other and “up” towards her shoulders.



Notes

Acupressure

Acupressure is a Traditional Chinese medicine which has been practiced for 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 parts of your labour toolkit such as massage, breathing, relaxation and visualisation can have many benefits and increased satisfaction with the 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.

<https://acupuncture.rhizome.net.nz/download-booklet/>



Hand Position



Shoulder position

The benefits of acupressure when used in labour are:

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

Acupressure is not recommended before 37 weeks. If practicing 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.

Module 3 - Relaxation

Visualisation

Our minds are powerful tools and can be used to manage the challenges of childbirth.

Visualisation/attention focusing/guided imagery are techniques that are used to prepare our body and mind for birth.

Just as athletes practice (in their mind) winning a marathon you can visualise your birth and picture it going well.

How to use it in pregnancy?

During your pregnancy you could use a more general visualisation. Picture your birth, imagine yourself responding, relaxing, moving about, changing positions and looking forward to meeting your baby.

OR

Imagine yourself somewhere, by the sea, in nature or somewhere that is personal to you, your happy place, bring a picture of somewhere meaningful to the birthing room. Visualise yourself there during the birth.

How does visualisation help?

- Can help your body and mind to relax.
- Increase the flow of oxytocin and endorphins.
- Diverts your mind away from the challenges of childbirth.
- During your birth, because the brain won't recognise the difference between what's visualised and what's real, your body responds instinctively.

How to use it during labour?

During birth you may want to use more specific visualisations to manage each contraction which can help to shut out distractions and close down your conscious brain. This enables your primary focus to be on coping with contractions.

Every woman is unique so have a think about a visualisation that may work for you but here are some suggestions:

- Imagine a contraction as an ocean wave.
- Going up and down a hill during each contraction.
- Your womb as a flower, tightly closed at the beginning, and then opening into a beautiful flower.
- Your baby moving down the birth canal during each contraction, your body stretching and opening.

When each contraction is over, rest and visualise your baby a little closer to meeting you.

OR

You could be resting somewhere that is meaningful to you.

OR

Visualise your partner massaging away all your tension.

Notes

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. It helps us to look at birth positively and helps our mind to start believing.

RELAXATION

What can I do to aid relaxation during the birthing process and help me to feel in control?

Maximise oxytocin and endorphins levels and reduce adrenaline levels by:

Preparing for labour and birth during pregnancy



Practice breathing for birth



Minimise interruptions and noise



Move about freely



Visualisation



Positive affirmations



Relaxation scripts



Hydrotherapy



Acupressure



Music



Relaxation

Preparation during pregnancy

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

Checklist of supports and ways to help me relax.

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

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

1. _____
2. _____
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6. _____

Why is this so important?

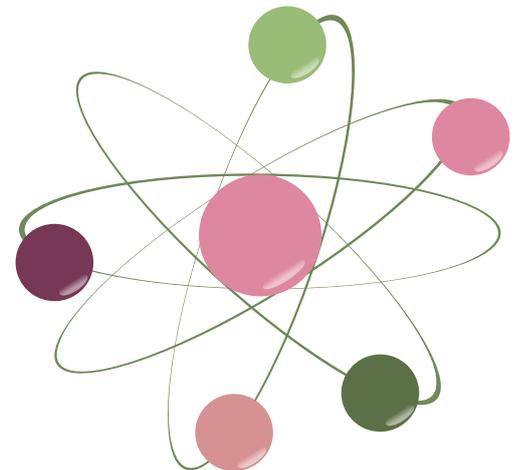
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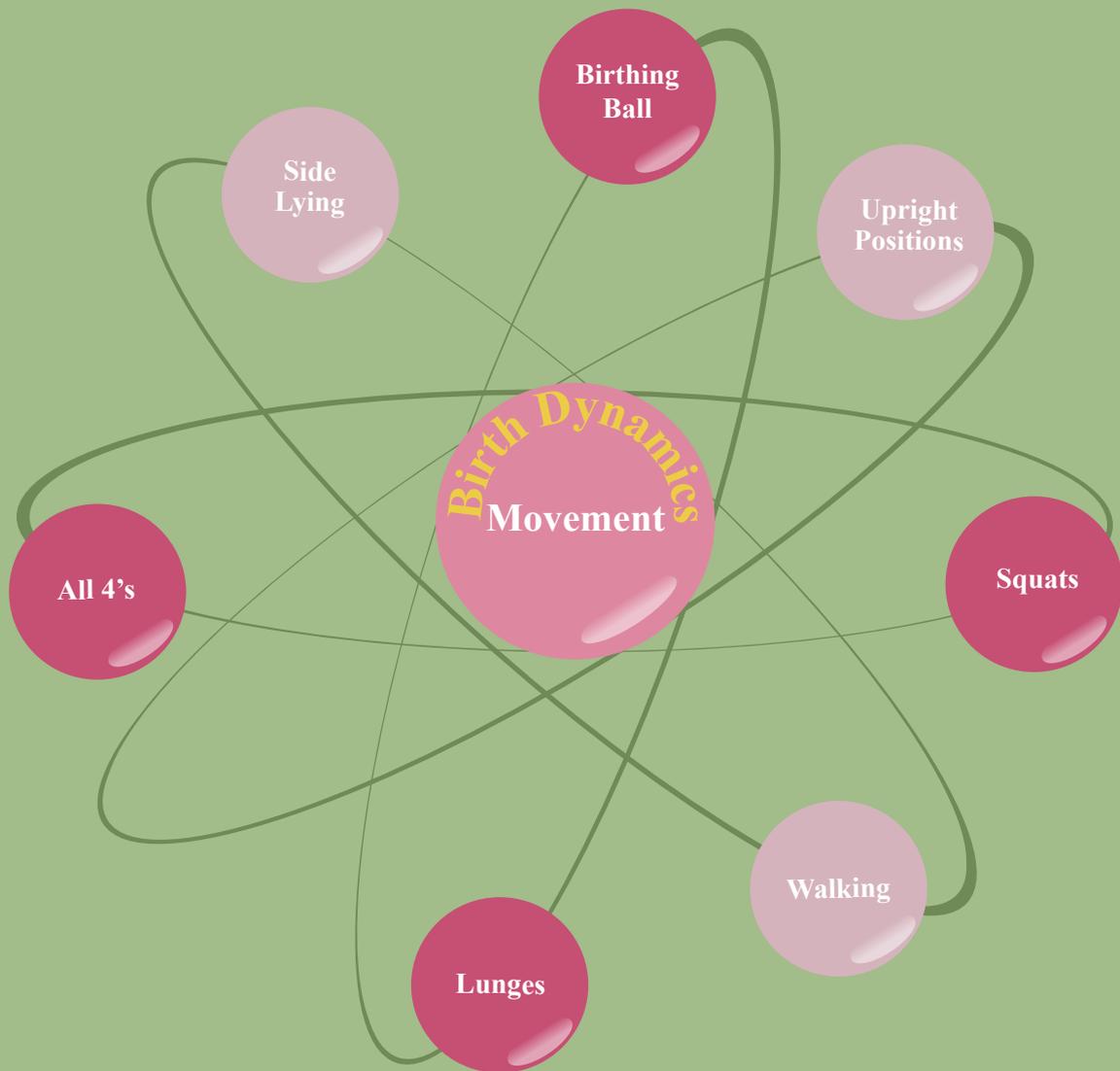
How can my birthing partner and support team help (to relax) me when I move from the home environment to the hospital environment?

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

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Optimal Fetal Positioning

Optimal Fetal Positioning (OFP) is a theory developed by a midwife Jean Sutton and antenatal educator Pauline Scott, who realised that the mums 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 we lead a more sedentary lifestyle. All of this can impact on the position of your baby in the womb.

If your baby is head down, facing towards your spine, with their back on 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 now facing towards your tummy. This can make labour longer as baby tries to turn and can cause increased back pain.

The good news is that there are steps you can take to help baby into a good position. It's not a guarantee but practicing 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 better for them and for you.

A first baby will usually "engage" (the head moves down into the pelvis) at around 34 weeks but can be later for second and subsequent pregnancy's.

It is important to be active in pregnancy but be particularly mindful during the last 6 weeks. Your midwife can discuss with you at around 34 weeks what position baby is in and what to look out for.

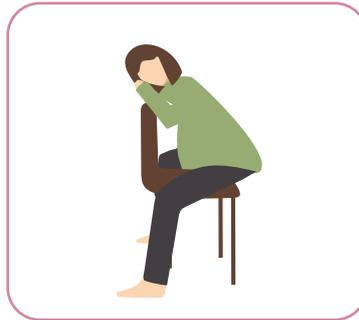
Module 4 - Movement

While **pregnancy yoga** is really beneficial, yoga, Pilates, swimming or long walks may not be for everyone, there are positions and postures you can use at home which are really useful.

Positions that can help:



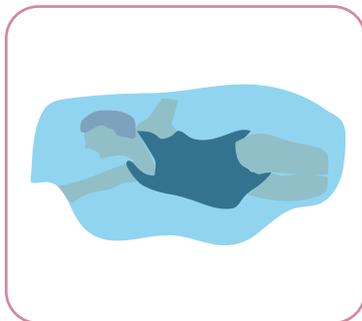
In your car, sit on a wedge cushion so that the pelvis is tilted forward.



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.



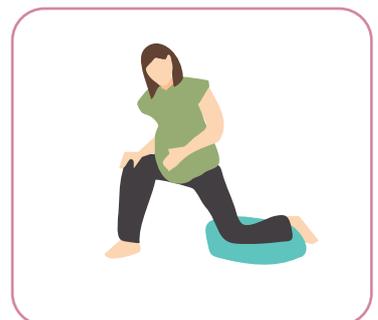
Yoga poses. Child's pose or tailor pose.



All fours positions (really good for back ache).



Hip circles or figures of 8 on birthing ball.



Lunging.

Sitting on a Birthing Ball do some:

- Hip circles
- Figures of 8
- Rock side to side

Why they help?

If your tummy is lower than your back, i.e. any of these positions, means your baby's back will tend to swing towards your tummy.

Try to Avoid:

- Lying back with your feet up
- Crossing your legs for long periods

Why they hinder?

If your back is lower than your tummy, i.e. any of these positions, means your baby's back will tend to swing towards your back.



When using the birthing ball make sure your hips are over your knees and that you are fully supported.

Notes

Module 4 - Movement

Movement and Positions for Labour and Birth

Moving about and changing positions during labour has many benefits which include reducing pain and making 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.

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 and use gravity to help your baby to descend down through the pelvis.

As part of your preparation for birth, practice these different positions so that you and your birth 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.

Visualise yourself during your birth changing positions making yourself as comfortable as possible.

Use any or all of the positions on the day, it can be helpful for birth partners to suggest moving about and changing positions as the birthing woman may not think of it herself.

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 makes contractions more efficient and effective.
- Can help baby rotate.
- Empowers you and can help you feel more in control.
- Diverts your mind away from the challenges of childbirth.

Rest

As labour can be a long journey and physical exhausting, it is so 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 side with a cushion between your legs or sitting on a chair backwards resting on a pillow to make sure you are comfortable.

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's important that between contractions you relax. Let a deep breath out, feel the muscles relax, take a sip of water, rest and recover.

Notes

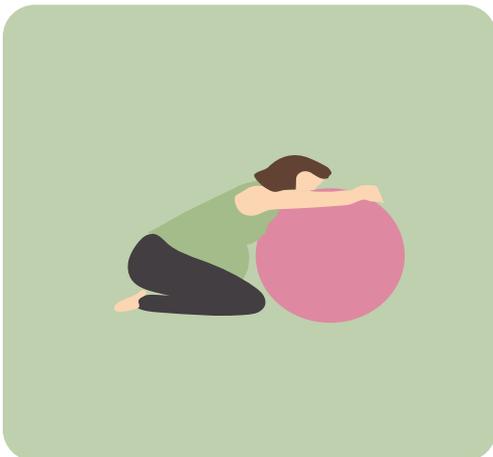
Module 4 - Movement

Birthing Ball – The birthing ball is beneficial to use throughout pregnancy and labour. Always use a ball that is non-burstable and the correct size for your height and weight. Hold onto a chair, bed or your birthing partner for support.



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.



All 4's 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 forward, sway from side to side or simply rest.



Comfort measures using the ball

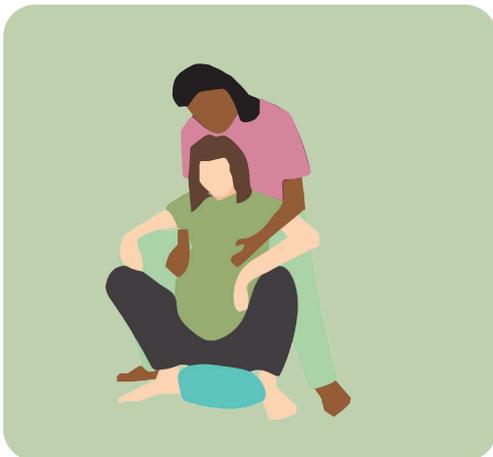
Use your ball to rest between contractions leaning over a bed or chair. This will enable you to remain upright and keep the pelvis open while you rest.

Squats - Squats are particularly beneficial during contractions in the first stage of labour and if the baby's head is high.



Supported Squat - Hanging squat

Facing hold your birthing partner around the 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 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 go of your weight and hang loose during the contraction but allowing your feet to remain flat and allow them to carry some of the weight.

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 all let the thighs provide the support. Sit on a chair if necessary to protect their back.

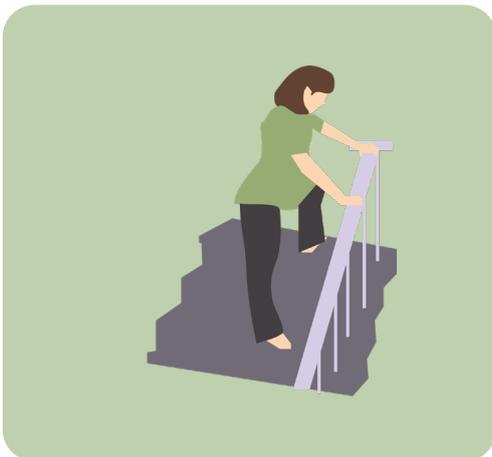
Module 4 - Movement

Lunges - Lunges are particularly beneficial during contractions in the first stage of labour and in helping the baby to rotate in the pelvis.



Kneeling lunge

Kneeling on one knee with the other raised up, bend your raised knee and hip and lunge sideways repeatedly during a contraction holding the stretch for 2-5 seconds at a time.



Forward lunge

This can be done from a kneeling position or using the stairs. Lunge forwards and backwards. If using the stairs, make sure to skip a step to open the pelvis or lunge sideways facing and holding onto the banisters.



Sitting positions

Sitting backwards on a chair. 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 the toilet and birthing ball for these sitting positions.

All 4's - These positions are helpful to take pressure off your back and can be used for the second stage of labour.



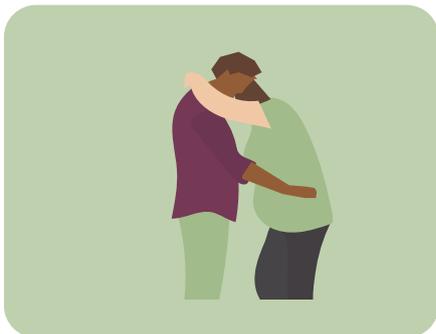
All 4's on the floor

Kneel on all 4's using a bean bag, mat or cushions for comfort. Rock your hips from side to side 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 4's on the bed

Kneel on all 4's on the flat of the bed or leaning 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. This is a great way to rest during contractions.



Kneeling in the birth 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 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 will keep the bones of the pelvis open and relive pressure on the pelvic floor.

CHECKLIST FOR MOVEMENT & POSITIONS

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

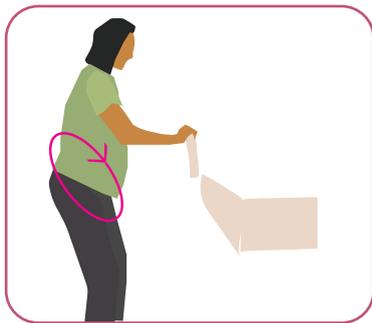
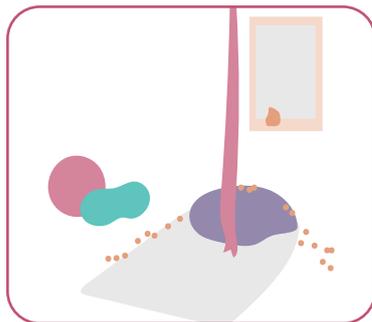
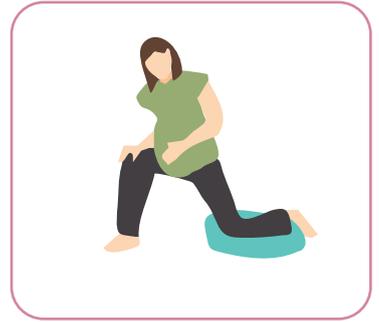


Use of chair/beanbag/s



Rest & side lying





Movement & Positions

Preparation during pregnancy

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

Preparation for birth

What positions would be helpful to use during the birth?

- _____
- _____
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- _____

Why is it so beneficial to be active in labour?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
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6. _____

What can I do to rest during labour?

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

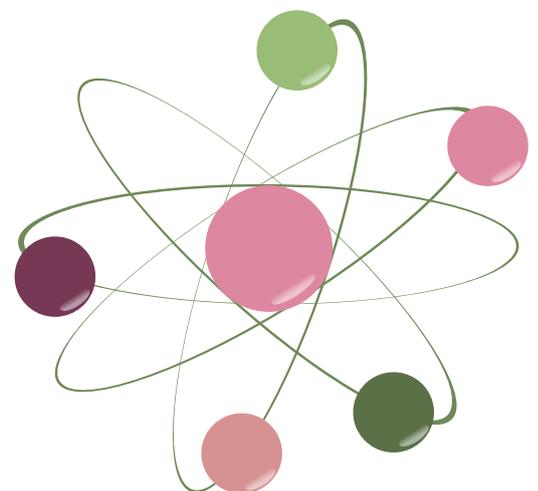
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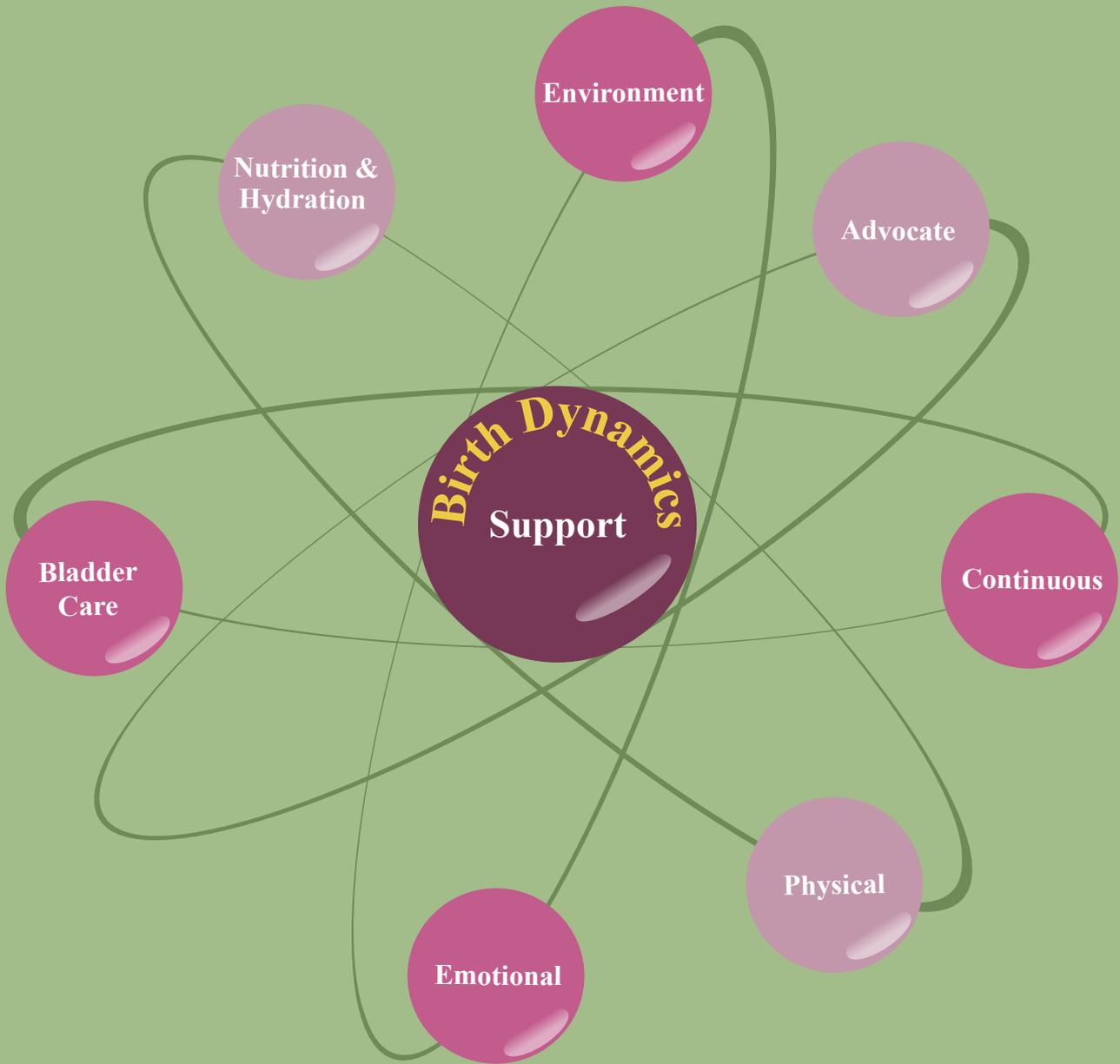
What positions are helpful in the second stage of labour?

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

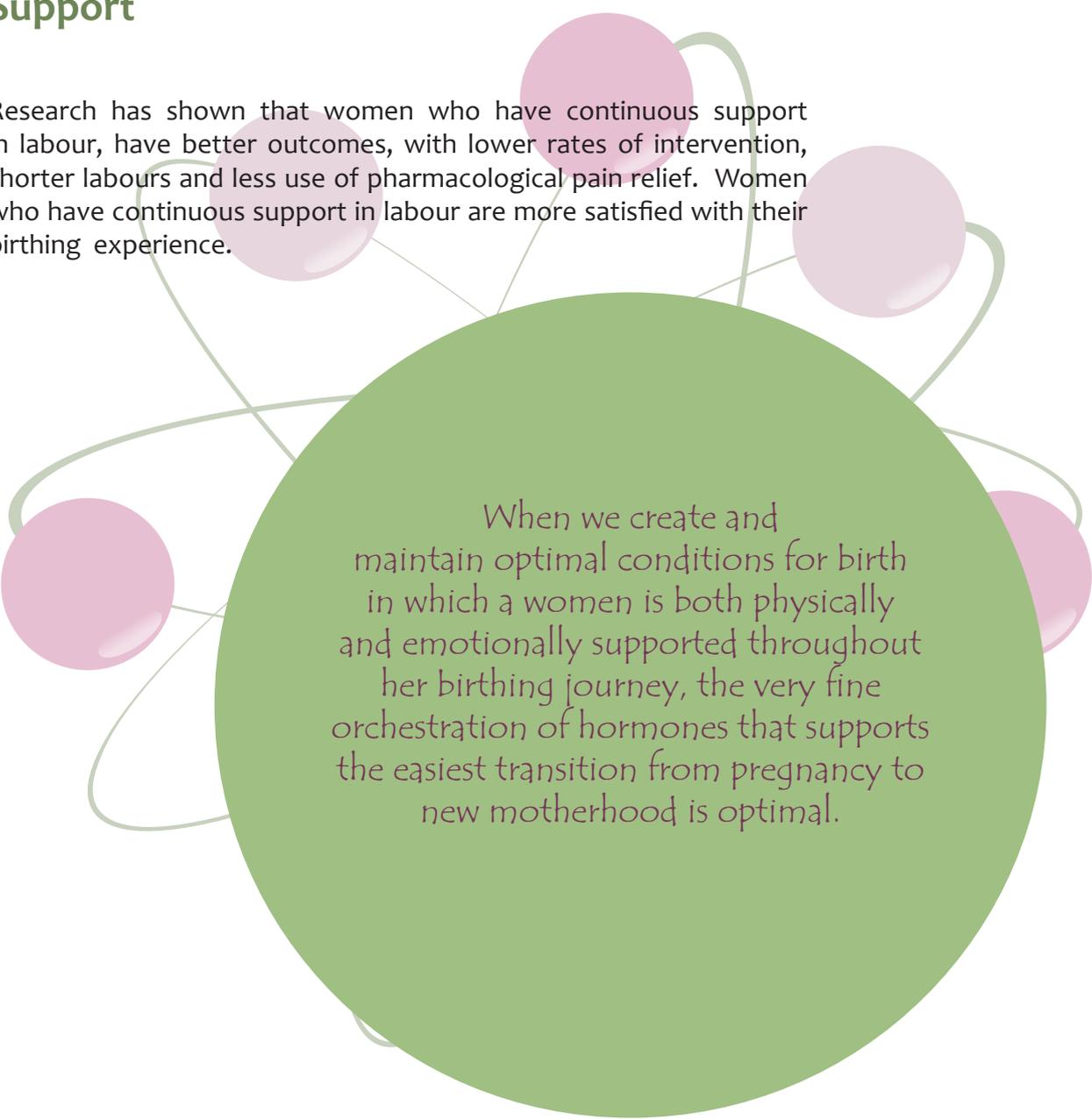
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8. _____
9. _____





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.



When we create and maintain optimal conditions for birth in which a woman is both physically and emotionally supported throughout her birthing journey, the very fine orchestration of hormones that supports the easiest transition from pregnancy to new motherhood is optimal.

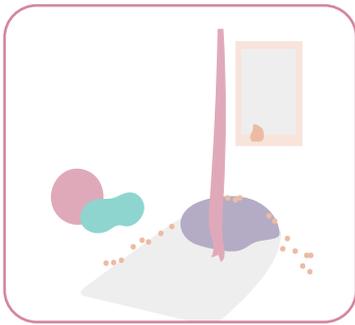
When we create a space where a labouring mother feels safe and supported, a space where there are minimal interruptions or disturbances, a space where she is warm, well nourished and hydrated, a space where she can move about freely, a space which is dimly lit and which supports relaxation, a space in which a woman is supported in her choices around birth, we are creating optimal conditions for birth.

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 birth partner is working as an advocate for the labouring mother, 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.



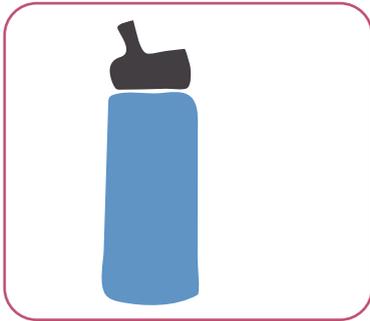
Creating the Birth Environment



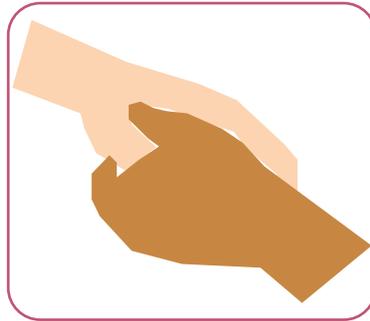
Changing Positions



Advocacy



Nutrition and Hydration



Acupressure



Massage



Positive Affirmations



Bladder Care



Hydrotherapy

What can I do as Birthing Partner?

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

Discuss birth preferences a few weeks before labour.

Discuss birth preferences with your caregivers on arrival to hospital.

Practice 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 in order that you can give maximum support to mum.

Create and protect the birth environment and conditions that promote calmness and relaxation.

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

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 you the energy to cross the finish line. This is why eating and drinking is so important right from the very beginning of labour until the very end.

The womb is made up of masses of muscle fibres that contract and retract all through labour. If we don't eat and drink the muscles can become exhausted, your contractions become less effective and cause more pain.



What should I eat:

In early labour, if you have a good appetite have a good meal and tank up on carbohydrates to give you plenty of energy for your birthing journey. If you aren't 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 muscles working well. You should drink enough to quench your thirst but there is no need to drink more than this.

One of the roles of the birthing partner is to offer snacks and fluids to mum during labour. It is also extremely important that birthing partners eat and drink themselves so they are able to give maximum support to the labouring mother.

It is also extremely important that birthing partners eat and drink themselves so that they are able to give maximum support to the labouring mother.

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

CHECKLIST NUTRITION & HYDRATION

Water



Toast / brown bread



Flapjacks/Healthy Cereal Bar



Jelly sweets



Isotonic Drinks



Smoothies



Rice cakes



How can I give the best support possible to Mum throughout her birthing journey?

Physical Support:

Create and Maintain the Birth Environment



Assist in changing positions



Massage



Rhythmic breathing



Nutrition and hydration



Bladder care



Acupressure



Hydrotherapy



Emotional support:

Reassurance



Positive affirmations



Advocating



Support in Labour

Preparation during pregnancy

What can I do during pregnancy to prepare for labour and birth with my birthing partner or support person?

Checklist of supports and ways to support

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
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How can my birthing partner and support team help me in early labour?

1. _____
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Why is this so important?

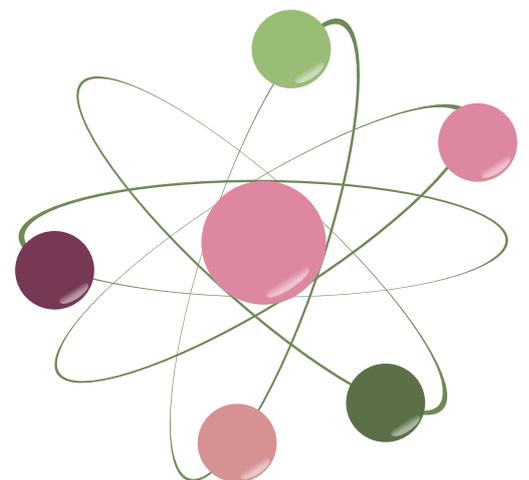
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How can my birthing partner and support team help me when I move from the home environment to the hospital environment?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
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6. _____
7. _____
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How can my birthing partner support themselves and what supports are there for them?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
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9. _____



Acknowledgments

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

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The ONMSD & NMPDU for their support in our continuous professional development which has allowed for the development of this programme.

The guardians of physiology around the world for their invaluable research that guides us in our practice.

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

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

- Attending a programme of antenatal education through the Dept. of Parent Education at the Coombe, inclusive of a Birth Dynamics class.
- Revising over the theoretical component of each module.
- Reviewing the video “Birth Dynamics a Toolkit for Labour” available on the hospital website.
- Practicing your relaxation techniques over and over again until they are second nature to you.
- Practicing your positions for labour and birth.
- Completing the worksheets at the end of each module.

Module 1 Hormones



Module 2 Birth Environment



Module 3 Relaxation



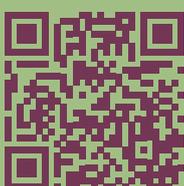
Module 4 Movement



Module 5 Support



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

