

Relaxation Techniques

Adapted from Lamaze International



Why learn relaxation for multiple pregnancy? Multiple pregnancy and birth are often full of stress-producing situations. Whether the stress is physical (such as discomforts of pregnancy or handling the effects of medications for preterm labor) or emotional (such as bedrest at home or worry over finances), using relaxation techniques can help make you feel better.

What does stress do? Stress has a negative effect on your body: it produces muscle tension, uses energy, increases blood pressure and heart rate, and can increase the sensation of pain. Prolonged stress has well-known effects such as ulcers, fatigue, and increased susceptibility to infection among others.

How do I learn to relax? Learning to relax is just that—*LEARNING*. It's not something our bodies do automatically. Your goal is to teach your body to return to a state of equilibrium, in which muscle tension, heart rate, breathing rate and metabolism diminish to their normal state. The teaching methods use techniques of progressive muscle relaxation, focusing, and touching, all with feedback to help you become aware of your progress. Not only does relaxation help you feel physically better, it will give you a sense of control over your body. This is in contrast to the often uncontrollable forces that go along with pregnancy and labor.

What about breathing techniques? The breathing techniques we often associate with labor build on the principles of relaxation but add counting and breathing patterns as a distraction to pain. Because of the high incidence of cesarean birth and use of epidural anesthesia with multiple pregnancy, only relaxation and elementary breathing will be taught in this course. If you wish to learn additional coping skills for labor, there are other classes available.

What are the various types of relaxation techniques?

- **Progressive relaxation** is the systematic tensing and relaxing of muscles. It helps develop awareness of muscle tension and is excellent for helping tense bodies relax and rest more easily.
- **Selective or differential relaxation** encourages concentration and finer control by tensing certain muscles while relaxing others. A partner checks to see that only the tensed muscles are tensed while all the others remain relaxed.
- **Touch relaxation** encourages relaxing tense muscles in response to a familiar sensory cue such as a massaging hand or light stroking.
- **Imagery** uses your mind to relax your body by creating a mental picture that stimulates relaxed feelings such as a favorite place where you have felt calm, secure and relaxed. Specific scenes, colors, sounds and smells add to the visual image that you create.
- **Meditation** achieves relaxation by focusing on an object, sound, picture or activity. A calm atmosphere such as low lighting, soft music and a comfortable position are helpful. Meditation often combines repetitive phrases such as "I am" and "relaxed" with slow, even breathing.

Terms:

- **Cleansing Breath:** used for relaxation and oxygenation. Take a deep breath in (either through your nose or mouth); exhale slowly through your mouth, gently blowing out and releasing tension. The cleansing breath is used at the beginning and the end of relaxation sessions and will actually become your signal to relax.
- **Focal Point:** A non-moving object on which your eyes and concentration are focused. This can be external or internal.

LEARNING RELAXATION

Information adapted from ASPO/ Lamaze

- Get into a comfortable position. All joints should be flexed and supported.
- Close your eyes or find a non-moving object to focus on. Breathe slowly and easily.
- Systematically tense and then release each part of the body as it is called out by your partner or as you progress to it. Move slowly from one part to the next.
- Focus on how each part feels when it is tensed and when it is relaxed. Begin at Level I working on tensing and relaxing individual muscle groups. Move to the next level when you can easily achieve a relaxed state. By the time you are using Level III, you will be relaxing large areas of your body. Level IV is the ability to completely relax on command.
- Begin practicing now. You will benefit from the relaxation right away but you will see even greater results when you have practiced and are able to relax your entire body at once.
- Practice with a partner having them touch the muscle to be relaxed (Touch Relaxation).

Progressive Relaxation Level I

1. Take a cleansing breath.
2. Breathe slowly and easily.
3. Squeeze eyes shut; release them.
4. Clench jaw; release.
5. Bend neck forward; rest and release it.
6. Shrug shoulders; relax them.
7. Make a fist with your right hand; release fingers and relax hand.
8. Make a fist with your left hand; release fingers and relax hand.
9. Take a deep breath; release.
10. Tense back and chest; release.
11. Tighten buttocks; relax.
12. Squeeze thighs together; release.
13. Flex right foot, pointing toes toward body; release.
14. Flex left foot, pointing toes toward body; release.
15. Notice your body; all muscles are released.
16. Take a cleansing breath; relax completely.

Progressive Relaxation Level II

1. Take a cleansing breath.
2. Breathe comfortably, slowly and rhythmically.

3. Tense your face; release it.
 4. Tense your shoulders and neck; relax them.
 5. Clench your fists; release your hands and arms
 6. Tense your back; relax it.
 7. Tighten your buttocks, release.
 8. Tense your feet, drawing toes up; release your feet and legs.
- Take a cleansing breath; relax completely.

Progressive Relaxation Level III

1. Take a cleansing breath.
2. Breathe comfortably.
3. Release your face.
4. Release your upper body.
5. Release your lower body.
6. Count or imagine a favorite place while releasing.
7. Take a cleansing breath; relax completely

Progressive Relaxation Level IV

1. Breathe comfortably.
2. Use cleansing breath, counting or imagery to achieve release.
3. Relax your whole body at once.

BREATHING AWARENESS

- Feel your breath in your nose, mouth and throat; then your shoulders, chest, abdomen, back.
- Note the rise and fall of your chest.
- Feel the pressure of your body against a chair, bed, pillows, other contact areas.
- Listen to the sounds made by breathing.
- Notice changes in your breathing as you vary positions and activities.

SLOW- PACED BREATHING

This pattern is relaxed breathing at a slower rate than usual. It should be no less than one-half of your normal rate of breathing and is relaxed, from the mid-chest/abdomen. Slow-paced breathing provides good oxygenation and is the most relaxing. Begin with a cleansing breath and practice by counting "In -2-3-4 ----Out-2-3-4" as you breathe. Mentally link the ideas of releasing tension and focusing as you breathe.