

Relaxation Techniques

Progressive Relaxation

This relaxation technique helps you achieve total relaxation by progressively relaxing all your muscles, from head to toe. Concentrate on the tension in a particular muscle group as you breathe in and try to relax it as you breathe out.

“Close your eyes and concentrate on your breathing rate...slow and relaxed. Feel the air enter your lungs as you breathe in deeply...then feel the air & tension leave your body as you exhale with a big sigh. After several breaths of concentrating on just your breathing, shift your focus to the tension in your scalp and face muscles. As you breathe in, become aware of the tension...and as you breathe out, release that tension.”

Continue with one muscle group at a time (neck & shoulder muscles, arms, hands, chest & abdomen, legs, feet, etc), feeling the tension as you breathe in...and relaxing the tension as you breathe out. Remember to keep all the previous muscle groups relaxed as you progress through your body.

Touch Relaxation

As your partner gently strokes across your face and scalp muscles in an out & down motion, you relax those muscles. Partner then strokes gently down your neck, shoulders, and arms and you consciously relax those muscles. Continue in this manner through all the muscle groups in your body. Partner will look for signs of tension in your body and concentrate especially on those areas, signaling you to relax by gently stroking the tense muscles.

Neuromuscular Control

This technique will help you prepare for relaxation during contractions. After you totally relax your entire body (see Progressive Relaxation above), your partner will tell you a muscle group or part of the body to tense. Tense those muscles only, while keeping the rest of your body totally relaxed. Note the feeling of tension in that muscle group, hold the tension for several seconds, then when your partner touches those tense muscles, try to totally relax them. Notice the feeling of relaxation.

Partners-- select random muscle groups for her to practice tensing (right arm, left arm, right leg, left leg, shoulders, neck, etc.). Then progress to combinations of muscle groups (right arm and left leg, shoulders and right leg, etc.). Check for relaxation of other body parts while one part is tensed and cue her to relax by gently stroking the tensed body part.

Breathing Techniques During Labor

Deep (Cleansing) Breath

- A cleansing breath signals that a contraction is beginning or ending.
- It assists in maintaining an oxygen & carbon dioxide balance in your body.
- Take a deep breath in through your nose. As you exhale through your mouth, release all the tension from your body (sometimes it helps to “sigh”). Concentrate on relaxation!

Relaxed Breathing (Slow Paced Breathing)

- This is the first breathing technique used in labor and can be used for as long as it is effective. Don't go to the next breathing pattern until your body tells you to!
- Start with a deep cleansing breath.
- Breathe in through your nose/ out through your mouth at a rate of approximately 8-10 breaths per minute (about ½ your normal breathing rate). It can be either chest or abdominal breathing, whichever is more comfortable for you. Concentrate on relaxation.
- End the contraction with a deep cleansing breath and a sigh to release tension.

Paced Breathing

- Use this breathing pattern when relaxed breathing is no longer effective.
- Start with a deep cleansing breath.
- Use Relaxed Breathing at the beginning of the contraction. Switch to shallower, more rapid chest breathing as needed during the peak of the contraction (silent in through the mouth with “Ahh” and audible out through the mouth with “Hee”. Continue with Ahh-Hee throughout the peak of the contraction).
- Return to relaxed breathing as the contraction subsides.
- End with a deep cleansing breath and relaxation.

Patterned Breathing

- This pattern is frequently used during transition to help keep your mind off the intensity of the contraction.
- Start with a deep cleansing breath.
- Take 3 shallow breaths (Ahh-Hee) followed by a shallow breath in and a blowing out through puffed cheeks (Ahh-Whooh). It is also helpful to use quick, horizontal effleurage strokes on your abdomen in time with your breathing.
- Your coach can hold up fingers to help you concentrate on the 1-2-3-4 pattern while breathing with you.
- End with a deep cleansing breath.

Blowing to prevent pushing

- Use this breathing technique when you feel the urge to push but your cervix is not yet completely dilated.
- Repeatedly give short puffs through your cheeks (as if blowing out candles or trying to keep a feather in the air) until the urge to push has passed, then return to your previous breathing pattern.

Breathing during Pushing

- Don't push until your body tells you to push! As you feel the urge to bear down, assume a pushing position. (See pushing positions in *The Gift of Motherhood, Chapter 5*. It is more effective to allow gravity to assist with pushing, so stay upright as much as possible!)
- Take 2 quick cleansing breaths.
- Inhale, then slowly exhale through pursed lips while pushing to a count of 8-10. (alternate method: hold your breath while pushing to a count of 8-10).
- Take a deep inhalation, then repeat pushing while slowly exhaling or holding your breath, repeating pattern until contraction ends.
- Take 2 deep cleansing breaths and relax until the next contraction.