

## Important Things to Remember While Breathing for Labour and Delivery

### The Complete Breath:

This is also called the “cleansing breath”. At the beginning and end of each contraction, breathe in as deeply as possible. Blow all of the air out through your mouth as you exhale. Each breath out should be as long as the breath in.

### A Focal Point:

A focal point gives you something to think about. It may make you less aware of the pain of the contractions. You can look at something in the room or a picture in your mind.

### Relaxation:

Try to relax all the muscles in your body during a contraction. Pay attention to the abdominal and perineal muscles. Watch for stiffness in your hands, shoulders, and face. Never hold your breath.

### Position:

Practise your breathing in a comfortable position. During labour you may need controlled breathing while you are sitting, standing, walking, or lying down.

Learning controlled breathing and relaxation takes time and practise. Keep trying. Use the techniques that work best for you. Remember that every labour and birth experience is different and special.



Adapted with permission of the Ottawa-Carleton Health Department

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# Relaxation and Breathing

## for Labour and Delivery



Relaxation is a life skill. It helps to lower stress and gives you better health and wellness. Learning to relax is an important part of getting ready for labour. If you practice breathing and relaxation exercises every day for 10 to 15 minutes, you may find it easier to relax during labour. Focus and enjoy feeling relaxed.

## Muscle Relaxation Exercise

This exercise will help you to know when your muscles are tense and will teach you how to get rid of tension. Practise the exercise in a quiet spot with soft lights. Sit or lie down in a comfortable position.

- Take 2 or 3 slow deep breaths.
- Stretch arms out to the side with fingers spread wide apart. Stretch as far as you can and hold for a count of 15, then release.
- Relax your right arm and feel how heavy and warm it feels.
- Repeat with your left arm and then each leg.

## Visualization

Visualization can help you focus and relax during a contraction. Use your mind to picture something pleasant and soothing that helps your relax. You may think of a favourite place. Think of how you feel in that place - warm, calm, peaceful, relaxed. Let those feelings bring you into a place of deep relaxation.



## Breathing Techniques

Controlled breathing can help you relax during labour. It helps take your mind off the contractions. It allows your uterus to work better and helps your baby to get more oxygen.

You should practise these different breathing exercises every day.

### 1. Slow, Rhythmical Breathing:

This is breathing that is slower than your normal rate. Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth.

- Take a full complete breath at the beginning of your contraction. Relax and breathe slowly out through your mouth. Concentrate on keeping your breathing slow and even. You'll see your chest moving slowly up and down.
- When the contraction is over, take another full complete breath and relax.

Some women find this breathing pattern works for their whole labour.

### 2. Shallow Breathing:

This is light breathing that is used if the slow breathing is no longer working. It's done only through your mouth and is faster than your normal breathing rate.

- Take a full complete breath at the beginning of the contraction. Relax and focus on a picture or a spot on the wall.

- Begin light shallow breathing through your mouth. Concentrate on the rate of your breathing. Make sure you breathe evenly to prevent hyperventilation. If your mouth and throat feel dry, place your tongue behind your top teeth as you breathe.
- End with a complete breath.

You may find it easier to focus and concentrate while you are doing shallow breathing. It can be tiring if you do it for a long time. Shift back to slower breathing if you can.

### 3. Pant-Blow Breathing:

This breathing may be helpful when your contractions become stronger and closer together.

- Take a complete breath at the beginning of the contraction.
- Do shallow breathing, but after every 3 to 6 breaths or "hee's" add a short blow, puff or "hoo" out of your mouth.
- Continue this pattern until the contraction is over.
- End with a complete breath.



### 4. Breathing for Pushing:

Good breathing during the 2nd stage of labour will make your pushing easier and help you from getting too tired. Both you and your baby need a good amount of oxygen, so don't hold your breath. **Don't push when practising.**

- Take a complete breath at the beginning of the contraction.
- When you are ready to push, quickly take a deep breath and bear down (don't do this when practising). Hold your breath for no more than 8 seconds. Repeat this until the contraction ends.
- Try to keep the muscles of the pelvis relaxed as you push.
- At the end of the contraction, take a complete breath and relax while waiting for the next contraction.

