

**NHS Forth Valley**

# **Breathing and Relaxation Exercises and Tips for Working with Pain in Labour**

**Patient Information**

A large, stylized blue wave graphic that spans the bottom half of the page, starting from the left edge and curving upwards towards the right.

## Introduction

Feelings of anxiety during pregnancy, labour and while adjusting to life as a parent are very common for new families. The art of relaxation is a valuable skill to learn to help cope with challenges of pregnancy, birth and life with your baby. Keeping relaxation exercises simple and practicing often helps you quickly master skills.

## Breathing Techniques

Women will find that as their contractions get stronger as they advance in labour the use of specific breathing techniques can be very helpful. Breathing often reflects our state of relaxation or excitation, when at rest breathing is usually slow and rhythmic and when tense breathing can become erratic, shallow or we may even hold our breath. Controlling breathing may help you become aware of your state so you can stay relaxed.

The theory behind childbirth breathing patterns is based on the concentration required to focus on your breathing. *During a contraction, the aim is that your thought processes are re-directed from a pain response such as tension and breath-holding, to a learned relaxed breathing response.* The successful development of a relaxed response to painful stimuli is most effective through practice.

## Deep Breathing

Deep abdominal breathing is the most efficient method of breathing for you and your baby. This technique assists you to relax and begin preparing for birth.

### *Why to do it:*

Deep diaphragmatic breathing (abdominal breathing) is a helpful technique for dealing with pain, anxiety, stress and anger.

It helps you to relax, acts as a distraction and reverses some of the physical symptoms of anxiety.

### *How to do it:*

Many people, especially when they are upset, stressed, anxious, and angry or in pain breathe only from the **upper** part of their chest. Instead, try taking slow, **deep** breaths from the **abdomen**. Rest your hands along the bottom of your ribcage, so that the fingertips of each hand are just touching. Your fingertips should move apart slightly as you breathe in, and then come together again as your lungs empty. Breathe slowly, for example for a count of 5, and breath out equally as slowly, this ensures the diaphragm is pulling air into the bases of the lungs.

## Keeping Mobile

Keeping active and mobile during labour helps women cope better with their contractions and can help labour to progress more quickly (the pressure of the baby's head on the cervix will promote the release of oxytocin which encourages the cervix to dilate, as well as releasing endorphins – the body's natural pain relievers).

Using the birthing balls to help with posture and to encourage pelvic rocking and using the deep breathing technique is also very useful.

Mobilising in the birthing pools can aid with the discomfort of your contractions.

## Keeping Positive

Acknowledging that labour is normal yet unpredictable and keeping positive helps to promote confidence that what is happening to your body during labour is natural.

Having a supportive birth partner to encourage you and help you to focus, helps you feel confident in your body's own abilities.

"You are doing well", "your body is made for this", you are already 3cm dilated you are doing really well".

Have confidence in your own self-help resources.

Rest, relax and conserve energy between contractions as labour progresses.

## Working with your Body not against it!

- Women are strong and brilliantly designed to cope with normal labour themselves.
- The discomfort of contractions is nothing to be afraid of; the endorphins make you forget about it almost immediately after your baby is born.
- Pain plays an important, positive role in the process of normal labour; it's your body giving you feedback, telling you what to do, what positions to get into and how to breathe, listen to your body and work with it.
- The pain sensations are necessary to stimulate the pain-relieving endorphins which are part of the normal hormone responses needed for normal birth. As your contractions get stronger and last longer, your body will produce more endorphins.
- After your baby is born and your contractions stop, the endorphins are still floating about in your body for around 24-48 hours giving you a feeling of euphoria.

Labour starts a cascade of hormones in both you and your baby which lasts after birth and into the early months of motherhood. The hormones are there to help you and your baby bond for life, and to help the milk come if you are choosing to feed your baby yourself. It marks the transition to motherhood, and can be seen as a right of passage as new mothers find their new role and their true strength.

## Notes

## Notes

## Patient Appointments/Cancellations

If you have an enquiry about an appointment or would like to cancel it, please call 01324 566249 or email: [FV-UHB.RTT@nhs.net](mailto:FV-UHB.RTT@nhs.net)

### If you can't go let us know!

Every month around 2,000 people across Forth Valley fail to turn up for hospital appointments. This costs the NHS millions of pounds each year and increases waiting times. So if you are unable to attend or no longer require your hospital appointment please let us know so we can offer it to someone else.

**We are happy to consider requests for this publication in other languages or formats such as large print. Please call 01324 590886 (24hrs), fax 01324 590867 or email [disability.department@nhs.net](mailto:disability.department@nhs.net)**

**For all the latest health news visit [www.nhsforthvalley.com](http://www.nhsforthvalley.com)  
follow us on [twitter](https://twitter.com/NHSForthValley) @NHSForthValley  
or like us on [facebook](https://www.facebook.com/nhsforthvalley) at [www.facebook.com/nhsforthvalley](http://www.facebook.com/nhsforthvalley)**

### SMOKING IS NOT PERMITTED ON NHS FORTH VALLEY PREMISES

This includes corridors, doorways, car parks and any of our grounds. If you do smoke on NHS premises you may be liable to prosecution and a fine.



**INVESTORS  
IN PEOPLE** | Silver

NHS Forth Valley  
Administration Offices  
Westburn Avenue, Falkirk FK1 5SU  
[www.nhsforthvalley.com](http://www.nhsforthvalley.com)

Re-order Ref: PIL/1180/WCCS

Review Date: 2020



Printed on Recycled Stock by Falkirk Printworks Tel: 01324 501490 Fax: 01324 501491 e-mail: [printworks@falkirk.gov.uk](mailto:printworks@falkirk.gov.uk)