

## BREATHING TECHNIQUES

Breathing techniques can be really beneficial to help you to stay calm and relaxed in labour.

When we are stressed, nervous or feeling panicked our bodies start to release Adrenalin – the fight or flight response. Adrenalin impacts on Oxytocin release (the hormone responsible for contractions), and directs blood flow away from the uterus to the large muscles of the arms and legs. Birthing is an instinctive bodily function, your instincts want you to give birth in an environment where you and your baby are safe. The presence of Adrenalin tells your subconscious that now is not a safe time to give birth – remember that other mammals are at threat of predators and our subconscious and instinctive behaviours don't know that humans have evolved past this!

Using your breath can help to reduce that Adrenalin response, and help your body to enter a calmer state, allowing those instinctive birthing hormones to flow.

Practice the following breathing technique regularly during pregnancy, and then use it to keep calm and relaxed in labour. Practice with your birth partner too, so that they can help you use the technique in labour. As you feel your contraction begin, close your eyes and relax your jaw and your shoulder. Breathe slowly in through your nose for a count of 4, and out through your mouth for a count of 8.

Repeat until the contraction has passed.

## NATURAL PAIN RELIEF METHODS

The following methods all stimulate the body to produce and release Endorphins—nature's pain killers.

**Labouring in water** has been found to significantly decrease women's experience of pain. As the nerves of the skin are stimulated by the moving water pain sensation is reduced.

**Transcutaneous Electrical Nerve Stimulation (TENS)** passes a small electrical current into the back through sticky pads. Similarly, to water, this stimulation alters the way pain is experienced.

**Acupressure** is a method of applying pressure to specific points during labour that reduce pain. Partners can have a role in labour. Techniques can be found through Google searching.

**Acupuncture** uses fine needles on specific points on the body to relieve pain. A qualified practitioner needs to be in attendance during the labour. More information is available at: [www.acupuncture.org.uk](http://www.acupuncture.org.uk)

**Massage** during labour helps to reduce pain by easing tension and facilitating relaxation. Some women suffer particularly with back pain, massage can bring relief.

**Hypnobirthing** is a scientific antenatal education method that empowers

women and birthing people to take control of their birth experience. Offering information and coping strategies that can be used to reduce anxiety around birth and the need for pharmacological pain relief. Hypnobirthing techniques are practiced in pregnancy and can be used in all types of births.

## PHARMACOLOGICAL PAIN RELIEF

**Gas and Air (Entonox)** is a mixture of oxygen and nitrous oxide, breathed in through a mouthpiece.

An effective form of pain relief that you control yourself. It can lead to nausea and vomiting but leaves the system after a few deep breathes of air and has no harmful effects on the baby. Can be available at home, midwifery led unit and Torbay Hospital

**Pethidine** is an opioid injection given into the muscle in your thigh or buttock to relieve pain. As well as pain relieving it can also help you to relax. Sometimes, less commonly, a medicine called diamorphine is used.

It takes about 20 minutes to work after the injection. The effects last between 2 and 4 hours.

There is a risk that it can cause nausea and vomiting. However, we also give an anti-sickness drug at the same time to reduce this risk.

There is also a risk that the drowsy effect may lead to breathing difficulties in baby and breastfeeding can sometimes be harder to establish. For this reason, we do not advise having pethidine or diamorphine when you are nearing the second stage of your labour.

Pethidine and Diamorphine are available at Torbay hospital and can be made available in the community, but there may be a delay as it needs to be collected from Torbay hospital.

**Epidural** – This is where local anesthetic drugs are injected into a space the base of the spine to numb the nerves to the lower body below the ribs. It is the most effective method of relieving pain, but is only available at Torbay hospital. It reduces pain, normal sensation, movement and bladder emptying. A catheter is inserted into the bladder and baby needs its heart rate continuously monitoring.

Common disadvantages of epidural are that the second stage of labour tends to be slower making the chance of needing an assisted vaginal birth slightly more likely. Your chance of birth by caesarean section is not increased by an epidural. Epidurals do not increase the risk of chronic back pain. The epidural may not work fully for 1 in 8 women. It may also lower your blood pressure and/or lower the baby's heart rate. 1 in 150 women get a severe headache.

Serious complications are rare, but do include infection or blood clot around

the spine. Serious or permanent complications affect 1 woman in every 30,000.

### **Birth Environment**

Think about what will help to keep your muscles relaxed and you as calm as possible as this will reduce your experience of pain.

All of the following can reduce tension and promote relaxation;

- Soothing music
- Soft lighting
- Birthing companions

Adopting upright/mobile positions

### **More information:**

Further information is available by following the internet link:

<http://www.labourpains.com/ui/content/content.aspx?ID=332>

Or by scanning the QR code with your mobile device.



No matter how much you prepare, it is hard to know how you will actually feel when you are in labour, so it is a good idea to think about your options beforehand. Each woman will experience and cope with pain differently. Labour pain and contractions will also change in sensation, frequency and duration, so you may consider trying a variety of different methods of pain relief to help you work with or through the labour.



**Torbay and South Devon**  
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## **PATIENT INFORMATION**

# **Coping in Labour Pain Relief**

For further assistance or to receive this information in a different format, please contact the department which created this leaflet.