

Provider Information

CB-EX EXERCISES, RELAXATION & BREATHING

OUTCOME: The patient will be able to demonstrate the relaxation and breathing exercises to be utilized during the stages of labor and delivery.

STANDARDS:

- 1 Explain, demonstrate, and supervise the return demonstration of relaxation techniques, e.g., muscle contraction/relaxation, focusing, touching.
- 2 Explain, demonstrate, and supervise the return demonstration of breathing exercises appropriate to each stage of labor. Examples may include:
 - a. Slow-paced (slow/deep chest) for early labor.
 - b. Modified-paced breathing (light chest breathing) for active labor.
 - c. Pattern paced breathing (almost no chest breathing) for transition labor to inhibit pushing.
 - d. Method of breathing when pushing during delivery.

Highlights of Exercises, Relaxation and breathing for pain relief during labor and delivery

Discuss with the expectant mother the non-pharmacologic pain relief methods for labor

Exercises, Relaxation and Coaching during Labor

Some women choose to give birth using no medications at all, relying instead of techniques such as relaxation and controlled breathing for pain. This is called natural childbirth. The mother is in control of her body, usually with a labor partner, friend or nurse gently guiding and supporting her through the stages of labor.

For many moms-to-be, having a natural childbirth is not about being "brave" or a "martyr" — it is about treating labor and delivery as a natural event. Many women find the experience, despite the pain, extremely empowering and rewarding.

About Natural Childbirth

Natural childbirth is a "low-tech" way of giving birth by letting nature take its course. This may include:

- Going through labor and delivery without the help of medications, including pain relievers such as epidurals
- Using few or no artificial medical interventions such as continuous fetal monitoring or episiotomies (when the area between the vagina and anus, called the perineum, is cut to make room for the baby during delivery)
- Allowing the woman to lead the labor and delivery process, dealing with it in any way she is comfortable

Many women with low-risk pregnancies choose natural childbirth to avoid any possible risks that medications could pose for the mother or baby. Pain medications can affect your labor — your blood pressure might drop, your labor might slow down or speed up, you might become nauseous, and you might feel a sense of lack of control.

Women choose natural childbirth to feel more in touch with the birth experience and to deal with labor in a proactive manner.

All mothers should be given the option of delivering their baby by natural childbirth. Check to see if there are childbirth classes available locally. These childbirth classes help prepare the pregnant mom to choose a natural delivery versus having a medical intervention/drugs during the delivery. The goal is to increase a mother's confidence in her ability to give birth by attending classes to help the mother understand how to cope with pain in ways that both facilitate labor and promote comfort, including focused breathing, movement and massage.

Breathing Exercises:

At the first sign of a contraction, a woman focuses her eyes on a particular object (say a spot on the wall), thus introducing a visual stimulus that goes directly to her brain. Next, the woman takes a deep cleansing breath, followed by rhythmic breathing that maintains the mother to relax. This is followed by a light fingertip massage that the woman (or her partner) performs on her abdomen or thighs. The massage introduces a tactile stimulus that, again, goes directly to her brain. Finally, the woman's partner provides a series of commands or verbal encouragement that introduces an auditory stimulus to her brain.

Stages of Labor:

In **early labor**, the cervix is effacing (or thinning out) and beginning to dilate (or open up). The cervix must open to ten centimeters before a woman can start pushing. During this phase, labor is tolerable. The uterus, which is a muscle, is contracting regularly, at intervals that may start out at 15 minutes apart but then become more frequent. Contractions during this phase usually last about 30 seconds.

Mid Labor When the cervix is about four centimeters dilated, the contractions increase in duration, becoming more frequent and lasting about 45 seconds.

Hard Labor begins at about six or seven centimeters with contractions coming every 90 seconds and lasting for about 90 seconds. While this is the most painful part of labor, it is also the shortest, often lasting no more than one or two hours. When the cervix is completely dilated, the mother will feel a sensation of pressure that feels like she has to make a bowel movement. Hard labor is over! The soon-to-be mom can now begin the one or two hour process of pushing the baby down the birth canal so he or she can finally meet Mom and Dad!

A "typical" first labor lasts about 15 hours.

Click here for a Patient Education Handout for the mother on [Childbirth Exercises, Relaxation and Coaching](#)

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