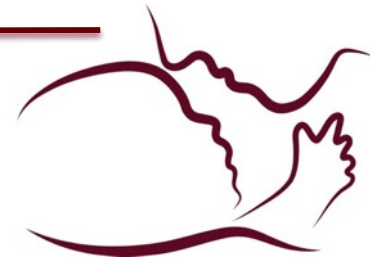


How to Better Cope with Labour Pain



Pregnancy is a life changing experience. A new life is growing within you. The time that your baby will be born and that you'll be able to hold him or her is something to look forward to, but it also might be a source of uncertainty and concern. Labour and delivery is a painful process. You might wonder if you will be able to cope with the pain. In this handout we explain some things about labour pain and ways to help you better cope with these pains.

Understanding the birthing process might help you know what to expect. However, we do have to realize that each delivery is different and that every woman responds differently to the pain. So, it is hard to know what your labour experience will be like.

Some facts about labour and delivery:

1. As your contractions increase, your body will produce a hormone, called endorphins. Endorphins will naturally decrease pain and stress, helping you to cope with the pain of contractions and making you feel more relaxed. As you feel more relaxed your body will produce more oxytocin, which stimulates the contraction of the uterus and thus enhances the progress of labour.
2. Labour pain is caused by the uterus contracting. It starts with menstruation like cramps, which gradually increase in strength and length. Initially these contractions are painful, uncomfortable, but bearable, they last about 30 seconds and the time in between two contractions can vary (5-20 min). These irregular contractions will gradually become more painful, longer, and more frequent and regular. When the baby is almost ready to be born, you'll experience the urge to push during the contractions. The birth of the baby will end these fierce contractions, but you might still experience some cramps for the placenta to be delivered, to control bleeding and for the uterus to gradually return to its normal size.
3. Most women will mainly experience abdominal pain during a contraction, where some women might feel the pains mainly in their back. These back labour pains might be considered more painful than the abdominal pains.

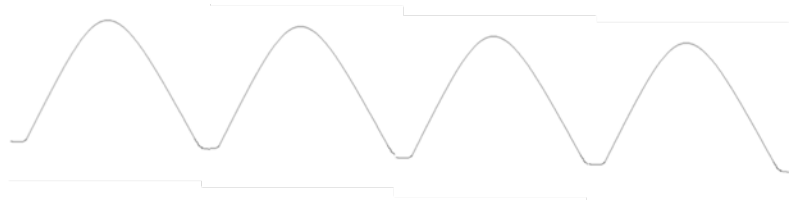
Ways to help you better cope with labour pain.

As long as the contractions are irregular and bearable, try to not focus on the pain. Carry on with what you are doing (cooking, washing dishes, watching tv, reading a book, taking a walk, a shower or bath) and look for distractions.

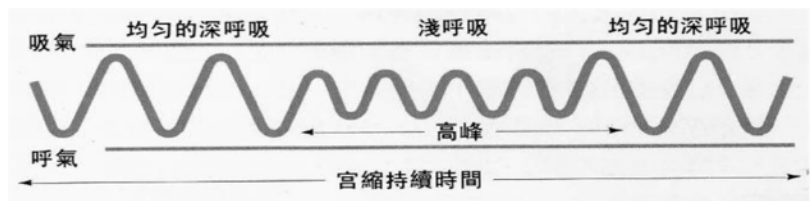
When the contractions become more regular, more frequent and more intense, you might want to use the methods below to help you cope with the pain:

1. Breathing exercises

Do deep breathing exercises during a contraction: breathe in deeply through your nose and breathe out slowly through your mouth while counting to four.



You can try another breathing pattern when the contractions become even more painful and deep breathing isn't helping you anymore: Start with deep breathing, at the peak of the contraction change to a more shallow and faster breathing pattern.



2. Relaxation exercises

When you feel more relaxed your body will produce more oxytocin, which stimulates the contraction of the uterus and thus enhances the progress of labour. Strong, painful contractions will cause your body to produce endorphins, which will help you relax and cope with the pain. Therefore, try to relax in between contractions. There are many different relaxation exercises that you can choose from. During pregnancy try and find one that helps you.

3. Try different positions

There are different positions you can try to help you become more comfortable. It's best not to lie on your back. This might reduce the blood flow to the uterus and the placenta and cause you to feel dizzy. Try to maintain an upright position and keep moving. Gravity will put pressure on the cervix, which will enhance the progress of labour and the descent of the baby. It will also help you cope better with the pain. ([Read handout "Different Positions in Labour."](#))

4. Warmth

Taking a warm shower or bath can help you relax and cope with the pain better. You can also place a warm water bottle on your abdomen or your back. The temperature of the bath water shouldn't be more than 37-38 degrees Celcius. If your waters are broken and you do not have good contractions, you shouldn't take a bath because of the risk of infection.



5. Massage

Some women find massage of the lower back or legs helpful. It distracts from the labour pain, prevents tension of the lower back and might help you to relax. Some women prefer continuous



pressure with two fists on the lower back (see picture). Try and see which method is most helpful for you.

6. Positive thinking

Your thinking can influence your birthing experience. Anxious thoughts like “I can’t do this!” “I want to give up” might cause you to experience even more pain. Think positive. After each contraction think: “This contraction won’t ever come back. I’m a little closer to holding my baby in my arms”.

There will be times that the pains are too overwhelming. Let others encourage you! Don’t give up and believe that you can do this!

7. Support of others

Your partner, mother (-in-law), relative or friend can support you during labour and delivery. Choose one or two people that you would like to be there for you. You should feel comfortable with their presence and shouldn’t feel that you have to pretend. Their support can help you relax and cope with the pain better, whether you’re at home or in the hospital.

How can others support you?

- Help with breathing and relaxation exercises (do it together!)
- Massage
- Wipe your face
- Give you a drink
- Help you find a comfortable position
- Encourage you; let you know how great you’re doing!

8. Pain medication

Talk to your doctor or midwife prior to the birth of your baby

- What should I bring to the hospital? Where in the hospital should I go?
- Can my partner (or someone else) be present at the birth to support me?
- Am I allowed to try out different positions during both labour and delivery?
- What methods of pain relief are offered at the hospital?
- Discuss the wish to hold the baby directly after birth and start breastfeeding. [\(Read handout “Starting up Breastfeeding.”\)](#)
- Discuss any other wishes or concerns

Please be aware that the information provided is intended solely for general educational and informational purposes only. It is neither intended nor implied to be a substitute for professional medical advice. Always seek the advice of your physician for any questions you may have regarding your medical condition. Never disregard professional medical advice or delay in seeking it because of something you have received in this program.

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