



NATAL CARE

Naturally

Drug-free Pain Relief...
before, during & after childbirth

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BEFORE LABOUR

...supporting your body through pregnancy

Pregnancy is a natural state and one that is different for every woman every time. You never know exactly what aches and pains you may or may not experience, but it does help to be prepared by knowing what changes your body will likely go through.

Your entire system is readjusted when you are pregnant. The heart pumps more blood and the lungs work more efficiently, as does the digestive system. With these and more changes occurring, it is no wonder that pregnancy can be uncomfortable at times. Minor aches and pains can be dealt with; however, you should never ignore pain or extreme fatigue, which can be warning signs of trouble. Always consult your Lead Maternity Carer or Doctor if concerned.

Natural Solutions to Common Aches & Pains

Here's some common aches and pains you may experience during pregnancy, some insights into why they happen, and what you can do to make yourself more comfortable.

- Morning Sickness
- Heart Burn & Indigestion
- Leg Cramps
- Sleeplessness
- Haemorrhoids & Constipation
- Anxiety
- Back Pain
- Swelling



Morning Sickness

Morning sickness is that nasty nauseous feeling you experience mainly during the first trimester of your pregnancy. According to doctors, morning sickness is a positive sign caused by an increase in hormones that indicate your placenta is developing well. Whilst there is no cure for morning sickness, there are things you can do to make it more bearable.

What can help with morning sickness?

Stock up on Ginger

Ginger is a popular remedy for morning sickness. The main compound in ginger is gingerol, which contains anti-inflammatory properties that help neutralise stomach acids. Try herbal teas containing ginger or make your own ginger tea using fresh ginger, lemon and honey with hot water. Crystallised ginger is great to have in your bag for those times when you are away from the house.

Minty Fresh

The aroma of peppermint essential oil can help a queasy stomach. If you don't have an aromatherapy diffuser, you could fill a large bowl with hot water, place two drops of peppermint essential oil in the bowl and place it on a table near your bed.

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Eat Smart

Unlike other cases of nausea, morning sickness can be helped by eating. The best approach is to eat little and often. Keep healthy snack supplies close by in your bag, work desk and car. You will work out what foods help the most, but we would recommend avoiding hot, spicy foods and filling up on crackers, fruit and nuts. An empty stomach will bring on morning sickness, so don't skip meals and try eating crackers or toast before you get out of bed in the morning.

Drink Up

Stay hydrated by drinking between meals rather than while you eat. This will help prevent your stomach from getting too full. Ice-cold or sparkling water are great options, and of course there are great drinks that contain ginger: ginger ale, ginger beer and ginger tea.

Take a Break

Tiredness is a big contributor to morning sickness, so take naps and go to bed early whenever you can. Reduce your stress and clear your diary. Put your feet up with a good book; rest and relax.

Help your Hyper-Nose

Many women get a heightened sense of smell during pregnancy and certain smells can cause nausea. Try to open windows to let in fresh air, avoid hot places and carry a hanky in your pocket which has a dash of essential oil on it (lemon oil is a great one for this). If you can't avoid an offensive smell, hold the hanky to your nose.

Other Natural Remedies

You could try sugar-free gum, Preggie Pops, Quease-Ease, Sea-bands, Morning Med by Naturo Pharm or Blackmores Morning Sickness Formula. Vitamin B6 has been shown to reduce early-pregnancy nausea. Ask your LMC if you can take a higher dose of B6.

Did you know?

When pregnant the amount of blood pumped by your heart increases by 40 to 50 percent.



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Heartburn & Indigestion

A growing uterus can push stomach acid in the wrong direction, causing many pregnant women to suffer from a burning sensation in the throat and chest.

What can help with Heartburn & Indigestion?

Good food choices

Carbonated drinks, and high-fat or spicy foods are classic causes of indigestion and heartburn. Particularly avoid consuming them in the evening as symptoms will get worse when you lie down. Again, eating little and often, will help you to stay comfortable. Avoid large meals. If you are suffering in the night, prop yourself up in bed with some extra pillows.

A spoonful of goodness

Try combining a teaspoon of lemon juice, a teaspoon of ginger juice and two teaspoons of honey with hot water and sip throughout the day. Or add one tablespoon of lemon juice to a cup of warm water and consume before meals. For quick relief from indigestion, you can drink a combination of equal quantities of baking soda and water. This works in a similar way to over-the-counter remedies such as 'Quickies'.

Chew-chew

Some women find chewing sugar-free gum helps, as it stimulates saliva, which has an acid-neutralising effect, but avoid peppermint as it is highly acidic.

Leg Cramps

Muscle cramps in feet, thighs or legs are common during early pregnancy. The exact reason for this is not known, although it is suspected that the expansion of the uterus puts pressure on the nerves and blood vessels in the legs, which then causes leg cramps and some occasional pain.



What can help with Leg Cramps?

- Avoid standing or sitting with your legs crossed for long periods of time.
- Stretch your calf muscles regularly during the day and several times before you go to bed.
- Rotate your ankles and wiggle your toes when you are sitting, such as during meals or watching TV.
- Take a walk every day, unless your midwife or doctor has advised you not to exercise.
- Avoid getting too tired. Lying down on your left side can improve circulation to and from your legs.
- Stay hydrated during the day by drinking water regularly.
- Try a warm bath before bed to relax muscles.

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There's some evidence that taking a magnesium supplement in addition to a prenatal vitamin may help some leg cramps. Check with your LMC or doctor before taking any kind of supplement during pregnancy.

If you do get a cramp, immediately stretch your calf muscles: Straighten your leg, heel first, and gently flex your toes back toward your shins. It might hurt to begin with, but it will ease the spasm and the pain will gradually go away. You can try to relax the cramp by massaging the muscle or warming it with a hot water bottle. Walking around for a few minutes may help too.

Sleeplessness

Sleep is so important for a pregnant woman, and yet many women are plagued with sleeplessness during pregnancy. There are lots of interruptions and discomforts that threaten a good night's sleep; frequent toilet trips, increased heart rate, shortness of breath, vivid dreams and, aches and pains.

What can help with Sleeplessness?

- Exercise early, never before bedtime.
- Avoid drinking lots of fluids a few hours before bedtime, particularly avoid caffeinated drinks like coffee and some teas.
- Wind down at the end of the day with relaxation techniques, like yoga, breathing exercises or listening to soft music.
- Try to keep your head clear of anxiety – read a book before switching off the light.
- Associate the bed with sleeping, NOT with eating food, finishing work or watching TV.
- Drink something soothing like warm milk and have a light snack before going to bed.
- Try sleeping on your side. Sleeping on your stomach or back is not recommended, and as your pregnancy progresses it will become extremely uncomfortable.
- Take a warm bath or shower before bed.

Sleep Aides

The most common sleep aid is the pregnancy pillow. A pregnant woman will want to support herself in several areas; under her abdomen, between her legs, under her head, neck and shoulders, and behind her back. There are many pregnancy pillows specially designed to give you all this support in one pillow. A hypoallergenic full-body pillow will ensure healthier blood circulation, and help you find a comfortable and relaxing sleep position. It also gently cradles your tummy and allows for maximum flow of oxygen and nutrients to the placenta, while minimising the swelling of ankles, hands and feet.



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Haemorrhoids & Constipation

Haemorrhoids are an unpleasant but common side effect of pregnancy. The extra blood pumping around your pregnant body, coupled with the extra weight you are carrying, can cause veins around your rectum area to swell and dilate. This can cause a lot of pain and discomfort.

Iron supplements, which are commonly prescribed to treat anaemia during pregnancy, can exacerbate constipation.

What can help prevent Haemorrhoids & Constipation?

One way to prevent haemorrhoids from developing in the first place is to keep things moving. Fluids and fibre in your diet will help. Fibre binds to water and swells, forming a gel that helps move stools through your bowels.

Natural sources of fibre include fruits and vegetables, flaxseeds, prune juice, chia seeds, whole grains and beans.



Some ways to increase your fibre intake:

- Mix one to two tablespoons of chia seeds into almond butter, yogurt, smoothies, or breakfast cereal. Chia seeds also contain high levels of omega-3 fatty acids, which are important for foetal neurological development.
- Sprinkle oat bran or wheat bran in cereal or yogurt, or incorporate it into a smoothie.
- Magnesium is a natural laxative. Dark leafy greens, nuts, seeds, legumes, and whole grains are good sources.
- Some people report that papaya has a laxative effect. Be sure to not overdo it, because too much may cause stomach upset and diarrhoea.
- Exercise helps stimulate your bowels. If you have a low-risk pregnancy, incorporate moderate-intensity activities like brisk walking, yoga, and swimming into your routine.
- Make sure that with increased fibre, you increase your water intake so the fibre can form the all-important gel that will get everything moving through

Treating Haemorrhoids

Try these natural treatments if you're experiencing discomfort:

- Soak a large wad of cotton wool in witch-hazel and apply to your rectal area.
- Apply a cool compress (or an ice-pack wrapped in a cloth) to your rectal area.
- Sit in a warm salt bath for 10-15 minutes, a few times a day.
- Use plain, moistened toilet paper that doesn't contain dye or fragrance.
- Sit on a donut-shaped pillow to help ease the pressure on the rectal area.
- Don't forget Kegel exercises help increase circulation to the area affected by haemorrhoids.

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Anxiety

Pregnant women can be prone to anxiety because of the hormonal changes taking place in their body. And let's not forget the life altering human that is growing inside her womb!

What can help with Anxiety?

Daily exercise

30-60 minutes of moderate exercise a day helps relieve anxiety. If you have not been exercising already, start slowly and work your way up to 30 minutes. Gradually expand your exercise time to one hour. Walking is the easiest exercise to work into your daily activities. Check with your LMC prior to introducing extra exercise to your routine.

Only good news please

Stay away from TV news, radio news, talk shows and the newspaper. Bad news can jump-start feelings of anxiety. You don't have to swear off current events forever, but perhaps while you are pregnant and having trouble with anxiety, take a break from anxiety-causing information.

Get out of the house

Talking is really important, so you aren't left alone with your thoughts. Even a quick trip to meet a friend for lunch or visit to a relative can take your mind off your anxiety. Check out the internet or library for pregnancy yoga, swimming, antenatal classes etc in your area. Isolation leads to depression and increases the chance of anxious thoughts, so spend time with others.

Get a massage

A massage will relax all your tense muscles. Use the time on the table to let your worries go. Stop thinking about the small stuff. Often the things we are worrying about, are out of our control or aren't even worth worrying about, so why waste your time on them.

Nice cup of tea

Green or chamomile tea are both said to be helpful in relieving anxiety.

Aaarr aromatherapy

Buy essential oils or candles in cypress, jasmine, rose or lavender scents. Burn the candles or put the essential oils in a scent diffuser and breathe deeply. Lavender is especially soothing. Check with your LMC before using aromatherapy oils.

Daily meditation

If you have a hard time sitting still and clearing your mind, set a small goal of meditating for five minutes in the morning or at lunchtime. Sit in a quiet place. Set the timer for five minutes. Breathe in and out through your nose. Focus on your breath feeling cool as it moves in through your nostrils. Feel it moving through your sinuses and moving back out through your nose, warmer than before. Try to keep your mind clear of all thoughts. Focus only on your breath and your nose. If you find yourself thinking about something, return to your breath and your nose. When the timer sounds, take a few deep breaths and then get up and continue with your day.

Take a moment to breathe

Take a break during the day and breathe deeply for at least five breaths. If you are anxious, you may tend to hold your breath or breathe shallowly. This will help break the pattern.

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Herb help

Ask your LMC if it is okay to take herbal remedies. Valerian will help you sleep, and it is effective for treating mild anxiety. Kava, ashwagandha and bugleweed are other herbs that have been used as anti-anxiety treatments.

Professional help

Seek help from a counsellor or therapist. Sometimes talking to a professional is extremely helpful. Get recommendations from your doctor, LMC or friends.

Back Pain

During pregnancy your posture and torso are thrown out of alignment. Carrying most of your extra weight in the front of your torso pulls on your back. It's essentially like wearing a backpack on your front, instead of your back, and it shifts your centre of gravity. This changes your posture and puts a strain on your back.

It will affect your sleep. You may be lying on your side to get comfortable, but the weight of your womb can still pull on your back muscles, causing the aches and pains.

Your hormones and body changes have some effect too. As your body gets ready for the birth, some of your joints and ligaments are loosening up to make delivery possible.

All of these changes can cause back ache.

What can help back pain?

- **Apply heat** in the form of a wheat bag or a hot water bottle, or soak in a warm bath to soothe muscles.
- During your pregnancy, try to **limit** unnecessary weight gain.
- **Avoid heavy lifting.** If you need to carry a toddler, use correct form; squat and bend your knees, keep your back straight and lift with your arms.
- Sit on chairs with **good back-support** and place a cushion behind your lower back.
- **Elevate** your feet on a stool or couch.
- Sleep on your side with a pillow between your legs. This keeps your hips aligned, which is better for your back.
- **Prenatal yoga** can help stretch out and strengthen tight muscles, improve flexibility and help with postural alignment (how the parts of the body hold themselves in relation to one another).
- **Prenatal Massage:** A certified prenatal massage therapist can bring quick relief when back pain is acute, especially when it's the result of muscular clenching that irritates nerves, particularly the sciatic nerve in the buttocks and legs which sends pain signals to the brain. You should first consult with your doctor, to make sure prenatal massage is safe and then make sure the prenatal massage therapist is certified.
- **Chiropractors** use a range of techniques to relieve back pain, and many women find relief under the care of someone experienced. Chiropractors routinely use joint manipulation (that popping sound!), soft tissue work, and prescribed exercises to prevent women from feeling muscular tightness, nerve compression, and joint misalignment. Chiropractors are good at detecting imbalances and helping to correct them. It is important to look for a chiropractor who works with expectant mothers.

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- **Pregnancy Swimming:** Swimming is a highly recommended form of exercise for pregnant women because it takes the pressure off the spine. Paddling up and down the pool lanes will help decompress your spine and tone your leg, arm, back and core muscles. As you experience full-body movement in a safe space, breathe deeply and fully to stay afloat. The deep breathing will help you relax emotionally as well as physically.
- A **maternity belt**, which you can buy online and in many maternity clothing shops, is a supportive undergarment that helps hold up the belly, so the pelvic girdle and lower back aren't too strained. If your belly is protruding forward in a pronounced way (rather than with your weight diffused across your midsection), the belt can act as a substitute for your abdominal core muscles, which can struggle to prevent your lower spine from painfully exaggerating its curvature. Doctors generally advise women to try maternity belts and use them if they work, but the belts should be seen as a complement to other remedies rather than the only treatment for back pain in pregnancy.

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Did you know?

During pregnancy your feet can grow up to one full shoe size! In fact, some women's feet stay that size after their baby is born.

Swelling

During pregnancy, the extra fluid in the body and the pressure from the growing uterus can cause swelling in the ankles and feet. The swelling tends to get worse as your due date nears, particularly towards the end of the day and during hotter weather. Mild swelling in the feet or ankles is normal, but you should consult with your LMC or doctor if sudden swelling occurs in any areas of your body.

What can help with swelling?

- Avoid standing for long periods. If it can't be avoided, stretch as often as you can.
- Prop up your feet when sitting and avoid crossing your legs.
- Lie on your left side when sleeping.
- Put maternity support stockings on before getting out of bed in the morning.
- Drink plenty of water. This may sound odd, but if your body is dehydrated, it will try to retain any fluid it can find in the body.
- Swim or stand in a pool up to your neck.
- Exercise regularly.
- Try to stay cool in humid or hot weather.



General Health & Well-Being during Pregnancy

The best way to enjoy your pregnancy is to keep yourself healthy. Your body is working really hard to protect and grow another life, or perhaps multiple lives, so give your body and mind the best care possible. Here are some key ways to look after yourself during pregnancy:

- Exercise
- Yoga
- Meditation
- Nutrition & Hydration

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Exercise

Exercise during pregnancy is a wonderful way to get ready for the birth of your child(ren); it manages aches and pains, helps you relax and strengthens your mind and body.

If you were physically active before your pregnancy, you should be able to continue your activity in moderation. Be wise, don't try to exercise to your pre-pregnancy level; instead, do what's comfortable for you now. Most exercises are safe to perform during pregnancy, as long as you exercise with caution and do not overdo it. Listen to your body and watch out for signals that you're pushing yourself too far.

If you haven't exercised regularly before, you can still follow an exercise program during pregnancy, but only after consulting with your LMC or doctor.

The safest and most productive activities for pregnant women are: swimming, brisk walking, indoor stationary cycling, step machines and low-impact aerobics (taught by a certified instructor). These activities carry little risk of injury, benefit your entire body, and can be continued through every stage of pregnancy.

Always consult your LMC to discuss your exercise programme and never overexert yourself. Pain is never a good sign!



Yoga

The practice of yoga can help you prepare your mind and body for labour and the birth of your baby(ies). Yoga helps you focus and concentrate. It also keeps you fit and flexible.

Pre-natal yoga is a good way to keep your body active and supple, as well as reduce common pregnancy symptoms like morning sickness, cramps, back pain and constipation. It can also help prepare you for an easier labour, by enabling a smooth delivery through relieving tension around the cervix and birth canal, and by opening the pelvis. Yogic breathing techniques have proven to be invaluable for many women during labour.

During the first trimester, standing yoga poses help strengthen the legs, promote circulation, generate energy, and reduce leg cramps. Ask your yoga teacher to show you postures that stretch the hamstrings, which can help avoid sciatica.

During the second and third trimester, your yoga teacher can help you tailor your practice to include useful postures for hip opening and back care.

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It is a good idea to join a pregnancy specific yoga class, run by an experienced yoga instructor. These classes are a great way to meet new friends in a relaxed and positive environment. If you attend a regular yoga class, let your yoga teacher know you are pregnant so certain postures can be modified or avoided.

Did you know?

During pregnancy, the body produces a hormone called relaxin that softens ligaments — the tissues that connect your joints. This is to help make the pelvis more flexible during childbirth.

Meditation

Meditation can bring an increased awareness, which works at a very subtle level. Meditation can help you explore your inner self and establish a connection with your baby. It allows you to find peace in the moment. For therapeutic purposes, meditation can help to resolve the deepest of neuroses, fears and conflicts, which are a major cause for stress and ill-health.

'Mantra Japa' meditation is a very effective form of meditation where a certain sound is repeated a number of times to have a remarkably soothing and gentle impact on your consciousness. It has an extremely positive effect on your senses and your growing baby.

Mantra literally means "that which liberates the mind". Ancient yogis discovered certain ways of developing and controlling the mind by using sounds, both aloud as well as mental. You can find your own mantra.

The good news is that learning how to meditate is not as difficult as you may think. And once you get the hang of it, it becomes increasingly easier. So here are some meditation techniques for beginners that should help get you well on your way towards better spiritual health.



Find a comfortable space

Although practiced meditators are able to focus in any space or circumstance, this can be the biggest challenge for beginners. Start with finding a space in which you feel most comfortable. As much as possible, this space should be free of any distractions such as television, telephone, computers, etc. It should also not be a place associated with work, such as a home office. If it's warm and secluded enough, the outdoors can be the perfect spot to meditate. Depending on how far along you are in your pregnancy, you may find it more comfortable to begin meditating while lying down on your side.

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Breathe

This may seem like an obvious suggestion, but learning how to focus on your breathing is actually the first step of meditation. To warm up, simply close your eyes and take in a few deep breathes. Once you're feeling more relaxed, begin to slowly breathe out through your nose while focusing on the movement of your belly as you inhale and exhale. You may have heard people making noises while they do this, as this can be an effective way to better focus your attention. Some experts recommend the "so hum" technique. Breathe in with "so" and out with "hum". You will be able to hold your breaths for longer periods of time as your body gets more accustomed to the process.

Stay on Task

Don't be discouraged if you find it difficult to rein in your thoughts. This is your mind's natural reaction to the sudden change of pace. Give it time to adjust. However, there are ways of keeping your mind on task. To do this, try counting from one to 10, saying each number out loud as you exhale. Eventually, you will get the hang of it and be well on your way to a healthier – and more Zen – pregnancy.

Nutrition & Hydration

Excellent nutrition and hydration are critical to having a successful pregnancy. You should be eating plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables for nutrients, quality dairy foods, wholefood carbohydrates, iron-rich foods and healthy fats. Throughout your pregnancy drink plenty of water and herbal teas. Avoid caffeinated drinks, sodas and alcohol.

Iron

It is important for women to increase their intake of iron during pregnancy. Anaemia in pregnancy is a very real problem affecting millions of women each year. Luckily, you can fight off anaemia by eating iron-rich foods, combined with foods that enhance iron absorption.

Iron-rich Foods:

- Leafy green vegetables (spinach, silver beet, kale, lettuce, broccoli)
- Lean red meat, fish and chicken
- Cooked beans, lentils and chickpeas
- Nuts and seeds: almonds, pumpkin seeds, sunflower seeds and flaxseeds
- Baked potatoes (skin on)
- Quinoa
- Tofu
- Dark chocolate (bear in mind cocoa contains caffeine, so eat sparingly)

Iron Absorption Enhancers:

- Fruits: orange, orange juice, melon, strawberries, grapefruit and apricots
- Vegetables: broccoli, brussel sprouts, tomatoes, tomato juice, potatoes, beetroot, green & red peppers, mint, parsley, bok choy and spinach

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Managing Labour Naturally

Pain relief during labour is on most pregnant women's minds. Everyone's tolerance to pain is different, and as such our need for pain relief will vary. Thankfully there is a whole range of pain relief options available to women in New Zealand; some are widely available; some you may need to arrange in advance. Remember you may have a substantial number of hours in labour so it makes sense to have a 'toolkit' of pain relief options ready before you go into labour.

If you are planning to have your baby in hospital or a birthing centre, then it is a good idea to remain at home for as long as possible. You will feel more comfortable and safe at home, but keep in close contact with your LMC, so you can work through the first stages of labour at home. By doing this, you often lessen the likelihood of medical intervention when you get to hospital. There are lots of pain relief options that can be used at home, such as a TENS unit, heat, massage and taking a shower or bath.

"My advice is to be prepared for your labour. TENS really helped me cope with the pain. I used TENS all the way to 8cm when I got into the birth pool."

Laila

In the early stages of labour, distraction helps pass the time and may help avoid the need for medical pain relief, so start putting your 'toolkit' together by considering the following:

- TENS (Transcutaneous Electrical Nerve Stimulation)
- Water: shower and birthing pool
- Breathing Techniques
- Movement
- Massage
- Aromatherapy
- Preparing your senses
- Vocalisation
- Visualisation
- Affirmations
- Hypnobirthing
- Reflexology
- Labour Aides
- Birthing Positions
- Helpful Advice from Mums



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TENS (Transcutaneous Electrical Nerve Stimulation)

TENS is one of the safest, most effective forms of modern pain control available to women during childbirth. The treatment is widely approved and recommended by medical professionals. It allows you to experience a mobile, drug-free labour, where you are in control of your pain relief.

How does TENS work?

TENS units supply gentle, electrical impulses through your skin via four self-adhesive electrode pads positioned on your back.

These gentle impulses attack pain in two ways:

1. by stimulating the **release of endorphins** - the body's own pain-relieving hormones
2. by stimulating the nerves to **block** the slower-moving pain messages coming from your cervix and womb before they reach your brain.

Benefits of Labour TENS

- No harm to baby.
- Drug-free pain control.
- No side effects or drowsiness.
- Used at home when contractions start.
- Can be used with other methods/drugs.
- Proven up to 80% effective for reducing labour pain.
- Non-invasive, giving freedom to move and walk about.

TENS and the Pain Gate Theory

Melzack and Wall proposed the 'Gate Control Theory' in 1965, and it remains the most respected theory of pain perception. They showed that pain impulses can be overridden and the perception of pain can be altered. Essentially, the brain can only cope with a certain amount of information at once. For unknown reasons - probably linked to our survival mechanism - sensation impulses from the nerves have priority over pain signals. When TENS is used you feel this stimulation strongly and the sense of pain gets put to the 'back of your mind'. You perceive the pain as less intense.

Endorphins are the body's natural painkillers and TENS stimulates endorphin release, again helping reduce pain.



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TENS - Frequently Asked Questions

What does TENS feel like?

TENS feels like a pleasant tingling sensation on the skin where the electrode pads are placed.

How is labour TENS used?

Self-adhesive electrodes are placed on the lower and mid-back. You switch on the TENS and dial it up until you can feel the tingling. It's up to the user to increase the intensity with each contraction. The unit can be worn as needed for as long as desired, but labour pains will require a minimum of 30 minutes in order to feel the benefit. Labour TENS is best used at home when the contractions begin, then continued through the stages of labour and can help for several hours after birth. Labour TENS help with uterine contractions after birth and whilst breast feeding.

When do I start using the Labour TENS?

Labour TENS is used in the first stage of labour when the contractions begin and are becoming painful. The earlier the TENS is used, the better. This gives your body time to build up natural endorphins.

How long should Labour TENS be used for?

The unit can be worn for as long as desired.

Is TENS safe?

Yes, very safe. Labour TENS units are specifically designed for labour. However, there are a few precautions:

- Do not use over broken or desensitised skin.
- Do not use before 36 weeks, unless approved by your doctor.
- Seek advice from a doctor, if you have unstable epilepsy or a pacemaker.

I would like a water birth - can I use a Labour TENS?

Yes, although NOT whilst in the water. You need to REMOVE the TENS BEFORE you enter the water. While you are in the water, your birthing partner can be responsible for preparing the TENS unit, so it can go straight back on when you come out of the water.

"We had an unexpected home birth and the TENS machine worked excellently for me. We had a healthy little boy in 40 minutes! We live in a rural area where help took longer than most places to come. We are very happy. Thank you."

Leona

Can I take the TENS into hospital with me?

Yes. Midwives and doctors are usually very happy for women to use TENS. Check with your midwife or doctor, if you are unsure. You may need to turn the TENS off temporarily, if electronic monitoring equipment is being used.

"TENS is the only form of pain relief I have ever used or needed - with all my babies. The sensation makes a remarkable difference to labour - thank you!"

Janie

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What type of TENS unit should I use?

Make sure you use a TENS unit specifically designed for labour. An 'obstetric' or 'labour' TENS will have a boost button which is used specifically for contractions. Make sure the unit is modern and comes with brand new electrodes that can be put on and taken off again.

Every unit should come with batteries and instructions. TENS units hired from [NatalCare Naturally](http://www.tenshire.co.nz) offer modern, reliable TENS units with all these important features.

Where can I hire a TENS unit?

You can make your booking on-line through [NatalCare Naturally](http://www.tenshire.co.nz) at www.tenshire.co.nz. The hire fee includes 6 weeks hire, FREE door-to-door courier service anywhere in New Zealand and FREE return postage. The unit arrives to you 3 weeks prior to your due date and it is due back 3 weeks after your due date.

When should I book a TENS?

The second trimester is a good time to book your TENS, but you can book earlier if you wish. If you have left it to the third trimester or even a couple of days before your due date, don't worry, go to www.tenshire.co.nz and a unit should still be available for immediate dispatch.

"TENS was the only pain relief I used during an incredibly short labour. It was quick, effective and meant no drugs. The best preparation investment made for dealing with labour. Thank you!!!!"

Carolyn



Water – shower and birthing pool

Shower

The use of water is well-documented as a labour pain management technique. Heat has been one of the most effective ways to help control pain for thousands of years. Labouring women can get in the shower and direct the water stream to specific areas of discomfort.

Birthing Pool

The main role of water is to help you get through labour by adopting a natural, instinctive position throughout the whole process of childbirth. Relaxing the muscles will make contractions significantly easier to bear.

The weightlessness and buoyancy of your body in water makes it easier to change positions while you float. In a relaxed state, your body will be producing more useful hormones facilitating a smoother, quicker progression of labour.

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A birthing pool may provide you with an increased sense of privacy. Once you are in the pool, you may become less aware of those around you and more able to move with your body's primitive and instinctive urges. For most people, the chance that someone might walk into the room whilst you're standing there in a state of undress, makes you feel very vulnerable and exposed. Being in a pool, creates a space just for you, which is unlikely to be invaded by anyone else.

Pain relief in water

In the water, one's perception of 'pain' seems to alter. It can be easier to accept the intense contractions and the resting in between contractions is more relaxing in water, than on land.

Here are some factors to a water birth that you should research and discuss with your LMC:

- Despite being in water there is still a risk of dehydration, so keep fluids up.
- The water temperature is important, overheating the mother can happen.
- It is difficult to use monitoring equipment.
- Care must be taken to avoid the risk of infection.
- It isn't possible to gauge exact blood loss.

"Deep breathing and warm water are the two things I would totally recommend, and I've had four children. Soft music and rocking your hips side to side in the water helped. The water takes the stress off your hips."

Jennifer

Breathing Techniques

Rhythmic breathing during labour maximises the amount of oxygen available to you and your baby. Breathing techniques can also help you cope with the pain of contractions.

When you are tense and frightened, your breathing becomes shallow and rapid. You might pull your shoulders up towards your ears and tighten your neck and shoulder muscles. If you move into a state of panic, you start over-breathing, sucking the air into your lungs and breathing out in short, sharp gasps. This cuts down on the amount of oxygen you take in for yourself and for your baby. You feel light-headed and out of control. Pins and needles start in your fingers and your mouth feels numb.

These are all normal reactions to a stressful situation, but your body can't continue in this state for long without becoming exhausted. In labour, your aim is to conserve your energy as much as possible and give your baby(ies) plenty of oxygen to help them cope with the stress of being born. Rhythmic breathing can help with this.

Simple breathing techniques:

Think of the word "relax".

It has two syllables, "re" and "lax". Now try this exercise. As you breathe in, think "re" to yourself, and as you breathe out, think "lax". Don't let your mind wander away from repeating the word "relax" in tune with your breathing. When you breathe out, try to let go of any tensions in your body. Focus on the muscles which you know become tense when you're stressed. Remember, every time you breathe out: "laaaax". The out-breath is the one to focus on: the in-breath takes care of itself!

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Try counted breathing.

As you breathe in, count slowly up to three or four (or whatever number seems comfortable for you) and as you breathe out, count back from three or four. You might find that it's more comfortable to breathe in to a count of three and out to a count of four.

Try breathing in through your nose and out through your mouth.

Keep your mouth very soft as you sigh the breath out. Many women also find it helpful to make a sound on the out-breath, such as "oooooooooh" or "aaaaaah". In between contractions, have sips of water to prevent your mouth from becoming dry.

"Try and keep in control of your breathing and don't panic or your breathing will go out the window and the pain will take over. Go to a pregnancy yoga class and learn how to breathe properly."

Liz

Support with Breathing

In the middle of painful contractions, when you're tired and labour seems to be endless, it can be very hard to keep your breathing rhythmical and relaxed. This is where the support of your birth partner is crucial. A birthing partner can help you keep your breathing steady by breathing with you.

Try keeping eye contact with your birthing partner, and they can hold your hands or place their hands on your shoulders, leaning gently on them. Then you can follow their pattern of breathing as they breathe in through their nose and blow out softly into your face. Tell them to ensure fresh breath for this!

"Breathe, breathe, breathe and be as loud as you want!"

Jacinda

Breathing and Pushing

During the second stage of labour, you will be pushing your baby out into the world. Sometimes women are told to hold their breath and push for as long as possible. This is no longer recommended; there is no evidence that breathing and pushing in this way benefits you or your baby, and it may increase your risk of tearing.

Follow your urges and push as many times per contraction as feels right for you. You may find that you feel the urge to push briefly three to five times with each contraction, taking several breaths in between. Labour is natural, so trust your instincts.



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Movement

Labouring in alternative positions can help with the descent of the baby, as well as provide comfort and ease pain during childbirth. There are many options: walking, pelvic rocking, positioning pillows for comfort, slow dancing with your partner, sitting and swaying on a birth ball (a large physiotherapy ball), lifting up the abdomen and rocking in a rocking chair.

Lying down during childbirth can work against the labouring body. It is great for brief moments of rest and gives the mother a chance to catch her breath, but try not to stay flat for too long.

Massage

Massage can be very beneficial for women in labour, but there are some tips and suggestions a birth partner should keep in mind in order to help during childbirth. In labour you go through many physical and emotional changes in a short period of time, so continued support from a caring birth partner can make a huge difference to your childbirth experience.

Remind your birthing partner to always ask before beginning massage during labour. This is very important, because when a woman is in the middle of a contraction this can be a negative distraction. Suggest they wait quietly until the contraction is over and then ask, 'Would you like me to rub your belly or massage your hands?'. That way you can let them know where and when you most need a massage.

There is more information about this in the 'Birthing Partners' section of this E-book.

Aromatherapy

Aromatherapy involves the use of plant oils, usually in the form of essential oils, to enhance physical and mental well-being. Essential oils can be added to a carrier oil, for massaging a particular area. Alternatively, oils can be used with an oil burner or vaporiser, so that the scent is carried in the air.

Each oil has different effects on the senses. If you have previously used aromatherapy oils or used the scents of lemon and ginger to counteract morning sickness earlier in pregnancy, then you will already be aware of the benefits.

Numerous oils may be beneficial during labour to help relieve stress, help you relax, act as a uterine tonic, stimulate circulation and much more. If you have any doubt as to the potency of essential oils then remember that doctors caution against the use of certain oils during pregnancy, usually this is because of possible effects they may have on the uterus. At the very least, aromatherapy will mask the hospital scent that so many people find unpleasant and unsettling.

Did you know?

In a recent study, 50% of the mothers rated the use of aromatherapy as helpful during childbirth.

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When can I use aromatherapy?

There's no technical reason that would stop you using aromatherapy during labour or the birth. However, hospital policies may vary widely on what they allow or encourage in delivery rooms, and if you're rushed off for a c-section it's unlikely the vaporiser will be coming with you.

Increasingly, hospitals are recognising the role aromatherapy can play in giving a woman the ability to set her own atmosphere for her labour, as well as helping her cope physically and mentally. If you're interested in using aromatherapy, then do check what your hospital or birthing centre's policy is. In some places, they have trained aromatherapists available to assist you.

If you have a home birth, then you will have complete freedom on the use of aromatherapy. As you go through the different stages of labour, your physical and emotional needs change, so it's likely you will benefit from using different oils or different combinations of oils at different stages.

What oils are recommended for use in labour?

If you're considering using aromatherapy during labour and the birth, then it is well worth consulting a trained aromatherapist for advice and guidance. The support of your birthing partner will be key, as which oil to choose will be way down the list of things to consider when you're in labour.



"I went to a Homeopath to get a birth kit – something natural that helped me feel like I had positive control over at least some of my labour. Apart from the obvious healing aspects for after birth, it also included remedies to help with the anticipation and anxieties around the labour process".

Sally

Oils that you may find useful:

- **Neroli**- Calms and reassures, which will help you to relax.
- **Bergamot**- A generally uplifting and refreshing oil.
- **Chamomile**- Soothing and calming, helps to reduce tensions and anxiety.
- **Jasmine**- Acts as a uterine tonic and painkiller; it is also anti-spasmodic. Jasmine is known to strengthen contractions and can be used in a compress to aid delivery of the placenta.
- **Rose**- Is a uterine tonic and anti-depressant.
- **Geranium**- Helps breathing and boosts the circulation.
- **Marjoram**- A uterine tonic that also aids breathing and can help to lower blood pressure. It is an effective pain reliever and anti-spasmodic.

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If you're using an oil burner or vaporiser, then use several drops of oil in the water. You can combine two or three oils, four maximum. If you need a strong boost from a particular oil, then your birth partner can put a couple of drops on a hanky for you to hold close to your nose and inhale.

Always consult with your LMC before using plant and essential oils.

Try dimming lights or using lamps to bring a soft glow to the birth environment.

NatalCare Naturally

Preparing your senses

Birth affects, and is affected by, every sense in the body. By giving attention to all your senses, you can bring holistic harmony. Labour pain management techniques should address all the senses.

Visual

For the visual sense, try dimming lights or using lamps to bring a soft glow to the birth environment. The majority of women go into labour in the middle of the night. This is no accident. Our melatonin levels are increased at night, which allows our bodies to relax, which in turn brings on labour. When we are exposed to light in labour, it has been shown to slow contractions, or even stop them altogether.

Smell

For the sense of smell, using aromatherapy, scented candles, or essential oils can bring much needed calm to the room.

Sound

For the auditory channel, speak in low, soothing tones. Refrain from unnecessary chatter or background noise. Music, such as that used for relaxation practice during the pregnancy, can be softly played to facilitate relaxation in labour.

Touch

For the tactile sense, use counter-pressure, massage or light touch massage, as and when it feels good for you. Bring soft towels, blankets or pillows to avoid rough textures.

Consider who you want with you during labour, at home or in the birthing suite. This is not a time for unwelcome visitors! Ask your birthing partner to carefully monitor who is in the room. If you prefer mobile phones to be switched off and windows to be open or closed, then share this with your birthing partner prior to labour.



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Vocalisation

Voice is a powerful tool. You may choose to moan with your contractions. You may choose to softly sing, chant or grunt. You should follow your body and know that whatever sounds you make are natural and therefore, good. There are no apologies here; you must follow your body's lead throughout the process of birthing.



Visualisation

Mental imagery is a highly-effective labour pain management technique. It is used frequently by professional athletes to naturally enhance their performance, so why not in this highly physical performance! You can use the same technique to visualise yourself in each of stage of birth. Try to imagine how you will respond to the different changes and challenges you may face. When we visualise a sequence of events as we would like them to happen, we mentally prepare ourselves to act in the same way when the time finally comes. This reduces anxiety of the unknown because the scene has become a familiar one, and will no longer be a scary, new experience.

Try to visualise your cervix opening, the baby descending and your breath as it enters and exits your body. These techniques are particularly effective when paired with an imagery relaxation script, either read by a birth partner or played through an audio device.

Some examples of images women use are: imagining contractions as ocean waves which, as they grow bigger, take you closer to a gentle shore where you will meet your baby or imagining your body as a flower-bud, opening up slowly.

Encouraging, goal-focused visualisations can be very helpful in labour.

Try to visualise your cervix opening, the baby descending and your breath as it enters and exits your body.

NatalCare Naturally

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Affirmations

Try repeating these positive affirmations over and over again. You can make up your own and repeat the affirmations aloud or in your mind while moving through each contraction:

"I can do this. I am strong."

"I am one step closer to meeting my baby."

"I trust in my ability to birth my baby."

"I trust my body and know I can do this."

"Find some positive birthing affirmations and write them down or make up some of your own. Repeat them every day leading up to your labour. This really worked well for me. I kind of went into a trance and focussed on one contraction at a time, repeating my affirmations."

Mel



Hypnobirthing

There are a number of people who offer courses for pregnant women in 'hypnobirthing'. This is a program of deep relaxation, visualisation and self-hypnosis that teaches women to replace concepts of long, painful labour with expectations of calm, relaxed and comfortable birthing.

Hypnobirthing teachers believe a lot of the pain of childbirth is caused by fear, which releases hormones that constrict the birthing muscles. By teaching deep relaxation techniques, women produce more endorphins ('feel-good' natural pain-relieving hormones) and therefore have a shorter, far less painful birth.

"I read the book 'The Hypnobirthing Book' by Katharine Graves and so did my birthing partner. I think the birth partner reading it too was important for me to feel relaxed knowing that he knew what to expect too."

Kerry-Anne

DURING LABOUR

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Reflexology

Reflexology is an ancient practice, in which pressure is applied to specific body parts - generally the soles of the feet - to relax other body parts.

During labour, a reflexologist can help women cope with pain, and speed the process of childbirth by applying pressure and stroking specific ankle points, which are said to stimulate the pituitary glands to release pain killing hormones.

If you plan to use reflexology during labour, plan ahead and find an experienced reflexologist in your area.

Labour Aids

Hot and Cold Compresses

Sometimes a simple heating pad may work wonders to relieve the pain you feel while giving birth. Either make or purchase a wheat bag and show your birthing partner how to heat it prior to labour. A hot water bottle or warm, wet or dry towels placed on the abdomen can provide comfort.

Some women prefer applying cold packs, such as an ice pack, on the lower back, or a cool cloth on the face or neck. If you experience nausea, then a cold facecloth across the forehead or neck can help. Remind your birthing partner of these things and include these items in your 'pain relief tool-kit'.

Birthing Balls

Birthing balls were originally developed by physiotherapists to be used for exercise and treating orthopedic and neural disorders, however pregnant women have found them equally beneficial. Using the ball throughout pregnancy can help strengthen the spinal muscles, making them less vulnerable to the back pain that increases as each month passes.

During labour, a ball is a much easier place to sit, relax and move on than a bed. The natural squatting position on the ball will also help to align the foetus and provides pelvic support. Squatting has also been shown to speed up labour. Gentle movement on the ball is a good way to relieve contraction pains. Some hospital and birthing suites have their own supply of birthing balls or you could borrow one.

Birthing Positions

There is no one perfect position for labour. Most women end up changing positions frequently during labour. If lying on your back on the bed is not comfortable or does not feel right for you, then move around and change positions. Let your body be your guide. During early labour, the more that you walk and move around and are upright, the more you are encouraging your baby to descend into the birth canal.

Left to your own devices, without consciously thinking about it, you are likely to find positions that work for you and your body. If you're looking for ideas, below are some positions that may work for you. Go over these positions with your birthing partner ahead of labour, so they are aware of the options.

Standing and walking

Some women like the sense of control they get from standing and walking during active labour. During contractions, you can stop to lean against the wall or on your partner.

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Rocking

Swaying back and forth in rhythm with your breathing or to music can be comforting during labour. You can do it while standing or leaning on your partner in a sort of slow dance, or by using a rocking chair if one is available.

Sitting

Sit on the bed or a chair with pillows supporting your back. You can also try to sit leaning forward, which takes some pressure off your back. Or try 'tailor sitting', or simply cross-legged on the bed or on the floor.

Sitting backward

Straddle an armless chair facing backward. Place a pillow between the chair back and your belly, and lean into it, resting your arms and head on the top of the chair. This position takes some pressure off your back with the extra bonus of making your back available for your partner to rub or massage. If you've got a plastic chair, try sitting this way in the shower, letting the warm water pour down your back.

Hands and knees

Get on all fours on the bed or on the floor. This is a very popular position. Research shows that being on your hands and knees may offer some relief from back pain before and during labour.

Lying on your side

This restful position can give you a much-needed break, while avoiding the compression of major blood vessels that may occur when lying on your back. Start by lying on your left side, which is preferable for blood flow. Slide a pillow between your knees for comfort. If you need a change or your baby doesn't seem happy with you in that position, have your partner help you turn onto your right side.

"I have four children and I found that standing and rocking through contractions helped a lot. Then when it was time to give birth, I knelt on my knees leaning against the bed head. This meant I was going with gravity, not against it."

Elizabeth



Helpful advice from mums...

"When I finally had a chance to look back on our first labour and consider how I could have done it differently, I realised that the final stage of pushing and the birth could have been different for me. I was conscious of what was easiest for my midwife and I was so busy concentrating on coping with the contractions, I didn't think about how I could improve my situation. I was lying on the bed on my back with bright lights on me.

I really wish I had asked to move onto the floor onto my hands and knees and asked for the lights to be switched right down. The last thing I wanted was bright lights shining on me! I am sure my capable midwife has delivered babies in all sorts of positions and could have adapted to my requests. For my next birth I made sure my birthing partner knew I wanted to move around with the lights down low".

- Clare

"Think about what you are going to wear during labour. It sounds like a small insignificant thing, but for my first labour I had on pyjamas. When I got to hospital, I had to take the bottoms off to be examined and then have my waters broken. All I could find to wrap around my waist was a small hospital towel (which clearly didn't fit around my waist!). I felt really self-conscious and uncomfortable trying to keep the towel around me.

A long t-shirt, nightie or dress would have been much better. If you are getting in a birthing pool, then a lycra-type singlet is a good option. What you are wearing at the end of labour doesn't really matter, but for the long hours of labour before the 'final push' I wanted to be more comfortable and less self-conscious".

- Jessica

"For my second child I reminded my husband over and over again that I didn't want visitors at the hospital after the baby was born. After having my first child I was physically and mentally exhausted. I was getting little sleep and I was recovering from a nasty episiotomy. Breastfeeding took up most of my time and learning to breastfeed required me to almost completely bare my chest so I could see what I was doing.

Breastfeeding in public was also a fear for me. So, ask yourself...'at this time in your life do I really need a stream of visitors?' I certainly did not! I needed peace and quiet, sleep, rest and the choice to bare my chest only to my new baby, my husband and my mum".

- Anne

"I have two children and two very different birthing experiences. With my first baby I was two weeks overdue, I had my waters broken, I was induced, I needed an epidural, gas and air, and a sick bag! An episiotomy and a big burly doctor using forceps to pull with all his might finally brought my first baby into the world. With my second child, I went into labour naturally at home. With the use of a TENS unit, heat pads, steady breathing, yoga and massage I laboured at home for eight hours. I arrived at hospital 9cm dilated where I continued to use the TENS unit, gas and air up until I felt the urge to push. My midwife had no trouble helping me deliver a healthy baby boy."

- Grace

AFTER LABOUR

...supporting your body after labour

You've finally put 40 (or more!) weeks of pregnancy and long hours of childbirth behind you, and you're officially a mother. Congratulations!

motherhood, which brings a variety of new challenges and requires different care for you and your body.

No matter how you gave birth, the first six weeks after birth are considered a 'recovery' period. Even if you cruised through your pregnancy and had the easiest delivery on record, your body has been stretched and stressed to the max, and it needs a chance to recover.

R & R Sleep Baby Sleep!

After labour, you may feel exhausted, both physically and mentally. It is very important to remember the need for rest and sleep, which will give your body time to heal and, prepare for feeding and caring for your new baby. Here are some tips to help you through the first few days:

Restrict Visitors

Whether you are birthing at hospital or home, ask visitors to wait until you have recovered from the birth and are settled at home, before visiting.

Sleep When the Baby Sleeps

It may seem odd (or even wrong) to sleep in the morning or afternoon, but now is the time to get as much sleep and rest as you can. Plus, in the early stages, a full night's sleep is a fluid concept. Forget about the clock, and take any opportunity that comes your way to sleep and rest. Babies don't consider what time it is when they are waking you for a feed, so for the first few days and weeks, day and night might start to merge into one very blurry cycle of time!

'Do Not Disturb'

If you are in hospital, put a note on the door saying, 'Mum & baby(ies) sleeping - please do not disturb'

Ask for Help

When your baby(ies) doesn't have a need that only you can meet, ask your partner, friend or family member to take the baby(ies) for a walk around the hospital corridors and into the hospital lounge, so you can have some uninterrupted rest.

Natural Solutions to Common Aches & Pains

If you've had a particularly difficult labour you may need pain killers to help you deal with pain and discomfort while you are healing, but do try the following natural remedies for:

- Perineum Soreness
- Afterpains
- Haemorrhoids
- Constipation
- Pelvic Floor Muscles
- Breast Tenderness



AFTER LABOUR

...supporting your body after labour

Perineum Soreness

Aftercare and proper recover is very important to relieve the pain and discomfort after a vaginal birth and an episiotomy. You want to avoid any risk of infection and complications. Try the following:

Add salt to your bath water to ease pain and help healing.

Make sure that you cleanse the perineum area at all times, especially after using the toilet. Use a squirt bottle filled with lukewarm water to the vaginal and rectal areas, then pat dry with a clean soft towel.

Apply cold packs or ice packs, wrapped in cloth, to the perineum area to reduce swelling.

Change maternity pads regularly.

Move around as often as possible, to increase blood circulation and speed the healing process.

Keep the perineum area dry and wear cotton, breathable underwear.

Avoid lifting heavy objects or strenuous activity as the strain may cause bleeding and break the stitches.

Take Arnica tablets to help with the bruising. This is a natural remedy but ask your LMC or doctor before using it.

Strengthen pelvic muscles by practicing Kegel exercises, after you have healed

Padsicles for Your Perineum

A padsicle is essentially a homemade cold pack. It is a frozen maternity pad filled with healing goodness, that you put on your perineum after birth. If you had a vaginal delivery, it's likely that your vulva and perineum will feel pretty swollen from the pushing. If you experienced grazing or tearing of any degree, it will definitely be very inflamed and sore, so this is basically the most cooling and soothing thing your vagina may encounter during the healing process. To make your own padsicle visit [here](#).

Afterpains

Afterpains are the name given to contractions that occur after giving birth. These contractions signal involution; the process of your uterus shrinking back down to its pre-pregnancy size and shape. These pains are not generally a cause for concern but can be uncomfortable.

Your uterus has spent the last nine months of pregnancy growing nearly 25 times its original size. The contractions after the birth help it shrink back down in about four to six weeks.

You may notice these contractions most intensely in the first few days after giving birth. It's also common to feel them more when you are breastfeeding. This happens because the uterus is sensitive to the oxytocin released while feeding.

Try these remedies for dealing with after pains:

Apply warm heat to your abdomen or back.

Drink chamomile tea. Chamomile is considered safe by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), with no known adverse effects in lactation. This is a great remedy for afterbirth pain due to uterine involution.

Mix one ounce carrier oil (olive oil, jojoba oil, coconut oil or sweet almond oil) with five drops lavender oil, 10 drops cypress oil, and 15 drops of peppermint oil. Gently massage a small portion over the affected area.

Add Epsom and/or sea salt with one or more of the following essential oils to a warm bath: lavender, jasmine, chamomile, peppermint or rosemary.

Some women find relief from afterbirth pain by lying on their stomach with a pillow placed underneath to apply abdominal pressure, or the motion of rocking in a rocking chair can help.

AFTER LABOUR

...supporting your body after labour

Haemorrhoids

This condition is very common after childbirth. Haemorrhoids result from increased pressure in the veins of the anus. The pressure causes the veins to bulge and expand, making them painful, particularly when you are sitting.

To relieve pain and help healing, apply warm and cold compresses alternately on the affected area. This will help in easing the painful and burning sensation caused by the condition. Soaking yourself in a warm bath will bring effective relief from the pain and discomfort. You can also apply aloe vera gel on the affected area, which soothes the inflamed veins. A salt bath is another good option.

In the first chapter of this E-book, you'll find more ways to soothe haemorrhoids.

Constipation

After giving birth, the perineum area can be extremely sore and some women have a very real fear of passing a bowel motion.

In the first couple of days after giving birth, drink lots of water and try eating kiwifruit and high fibre foods such as leafy green vegetables.

Many maternity hospitals have a drink called 'Kiwi Crush' or you can purchase this yourself from the freezer section in supermarkets.

Health food stores and pharmacies generally stock good quality natural laxatives. You may wish to add this to your 'Hospital Bag' list.

Pelvic Floor Muscles

Pregnancy and childbirth can weaken your pelvic floor muscles. Luckily, you can help make them strong again. Pelvic floor muscles are just like other muscles. Exercise can make them stronger. Women with bladder control problems can regain control through pelvic muscle exercises, also called Kegel exercises.

Kegel Exercises

Kegel exercises have been proven effective in treating urinary incontinence, as these strengthen the pelvic floor muscles. You can begin doing Kegel exercises a couple of days after childbirth.

You can identify your pelvic floor muscles by observing the muscles you use to stop the flow of your urine in midstream or with the help of your health professional. Kegel exercises are done by contracting and releasing the pelvic floor muscles several times in a movement, similar to stopping the flow of urine.

Here's how to do Kegel exercises:

Empty your bladder.

Lie down and concentrate on finding your pelvic floor muscles.

Contract your muscles and hold for three seconds

Relax for three seconds.

Repeat the exercise 10 times.

Once you have perfected your three-second exercises, increase the time of contraction and release to four seconds.

Develop your Kegel workout gradually, until you are able to hold your muscles at 10-second intervals, alternating between contracting and relaxing.

AFTER LABOUR

...supporting your body after labour

Helping you through engorgement:

Breast Tenderness

After giving birth, for the first few days, a new mother's breasts remain soft. They will produce colostrum which is rich in immune factors helping protect your newborn and providing nourishment. During the next few days, the breasts will become full, firm and often tender. This is called having your 'milk come in' or engorgement. Some women experience only a day or so of mild, easy-to-manage engorgement. For other women, engorgement may be more intense, and can last from several days to a few weeks. Over time your breasts will adjust and eventually make exactly the right amount of milk for your baby.

It is the baby's job to help the mother through engorgement by removing milk. If the baby is not latching properly or feeding frequently enough, the breasts may become overly full. This reduces the elasticity of the breasts and nipples. When the breasts are too firm, some babies cannot grasp enough tissue to latch on well. They may suck overly hard trying to pull in the breast tissue. This can lead to sore nipples. A poor latch may result in poor emptying of the milk and the build-up can cause breast engorgement to become severe. The breasts may redden and become painful.

Begin breastfeeding as soon as possible after the birth, to give your baby time to learn to breastfeed before the breasts become full and firm.

Once your milk comes in, breastfeed at least 8 times in 24 hours to prevent over fullness.

Use moist heat on the breasts for a few minutes, or take a brief hot shower before breastfeeding. This may help the milk begin to flow.

Use cold compresses for 10 minutes after feedings to reduce swelling.

Gently massage and compress the breast when the baby pauses between sucks. This may help drain the breast, leaving less milk behind.

A well-fitted, supportive nursing bra makes some women feel better. Others prefer to go bra-less during engorgement.

Gentle breast massage and relaxation techniques may help improve milk flow and reduce engorgement.

Ask for help from the hospital lactation consultant so that latch-on problems are solved as soon as possible.



AFTER LABOUR

...supporting your body after labour

Sore Nipples

Often at the beginning of breastfeeding it is common for women to experience sore and dry nipples. Try these natural remedies to soothe and heal sore nipples:

Apply freshly expressed breast milk:

Smoothing freshly expressed breast milk onto cracked nipples may help them heal by offering antibacterial protection. Make sure to wash your hands before gently applying a few drops of breast milk to your nipples. Allow the milk to air-dry before covering up. Note: If you have thrush, this remedy should be avoided. Any breast milk should be rinsed off the nipple after feeding your baby. Yeast grows quickly in human milk.

Damp Compress: You may find using warm, damp compresses after breast-feeding to be soothing on sore, cracked nipples.

Try a salt rinse: Mix 1/2 teaspoon of salt in 8 ounces of warm water. Soak the nipples in a small bowl of this warm saline solution for about one minute after breast-feeding.

Apply medical grade lanolin ointment: Using a lanolin ointment specifically designed for breast-feeding mothers will help promote moist wound healing. Apply to nipples after breast-feeding. It doesn't need to be removed before nursing your baby.

Change breast-pads frequently: Change nursing pads as soon as they become damp. Leaving the moisture against your nipples can delay healing. Also avoid nursing pads made with plastic linings. They can obstruct airflow. Look for pads made from 100 percent cotton.

Fresh air: As much as possible, expose the nipples to the air so they will stay dry and heal.

Seek out help: If you are having difficulties or experiencing pain or discomfort during breastfeeding, then don't delay seeking out help from your midwife, Plunket Nurse, Doctor or a Lactation Consultant.



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NatalCare Naturally

BIRTHING PARTNERS

...the role of the birthing partner

If you are the partner of someone who is pregnant, or you have been asked to be a birth support person, you have been given a privilege and a responsibility: to provide emotional and physical support to a woman who will need your help through one of the most significant and vulnerable experiences of her life.

Being the support person for a woman in labour is a wonderful experience, a great honour and a particularly personal journey if you are the co-parent of her baby. "You walk into the birthing suite with a pregnant partner and you walk out a parent".

A birth support person can find labour and the birth pretty daunting too, especially if you have never done this before. Many prospective birth support people admit to worrying about not knowing what to do and finding they are completely useless. They might panic or worse, faint! Not knowing what to expect, they are concerned they will be horrified and say or do something inappropriate. Some are genuinely worried about things going wrong, and that something might threaten the health of their partner or the baby.

These are all very common fears and perfectly natural when something major is about to happen in your life and the life of someone who is very precious to you. It's often really helpful if you can say (or write) what you're most worried about.

If you are anxious about the birth, it will be helpful to gather as much information as you can about what is going to happen, so when the moment comes you can be the best help possible.

Of course, the best person to talk to about the birth and how you can help, is the pregnant mother. She probably has certain expectations of what your role will be; ask her to explain them to you if you feel unsure. A few minutes of conversation can clear up a lot of uncertainty.

Before labour begins

Getting ready for the birth

Ideally, you will be able to attend antenatal classes together, where you will learn about different techniques that will help the mum-to-be to cope with the waves of contractions in labour.

The Birth Plan

Many pregnant women will write down a birth plan that will clearly set out her expectations and the decisions she has made about the birth. If your partner does not have a written plan, make sure that you take time to sit down and talk about some of the decisions she has made.

These are just some of the things a birth plan may or may not contain. Discuss these prior to the due date:

Place of birth – home or hospital birth, what point she would like to go to hospital and how to get to there

Support people– people present while labouring

Contacting the midwife– when and how

Pain relief - TENS set up ready to go (read through the instructions prior), the use of water, other methods of pain relief

Surroundings– music, lighting, aromatherapy

Positions in labour– breathing support, birthing balls, extra pillows or chairs, massage

Nutrition & Hydration - during labour and after the birth, have supplies on hand

Baby at birth– skin-on-skin contact

Who will be at the birth?

Birth is an incredibly private and intimate experience. It is strongly impacted by the psychological state of the mother; and it's really important that the labouring woman feels completely comfortable with the people who are in the room with her.

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Mothers, big sisters and mothers-in-law frequently assume that they will be a great help in a birth, when actually the labouring mother would be far more relaxed without them there. Be prepared to act as gatekeeper for her.

You may be tempted to use your phone during the long labour to let people know what is happening. For some women, nothing is more annoying - while they are working through painful contractions - than a partner consumed with sending text messages, making calls or, worst of all, taking photos! Discuss this beforehand and if necessary, turn off your phone. There will be plenty of time after the baby is born to let friends, family and Instagram know all is well.

What does a birth support person do?

Labour has distinct stages and there will be different requirements of you in each stage. All women (and all labours) are unique, so your role might be just to be there, having a chat in the quiet early stages; later, you might have a physically demanding role, holding the labouring woman upright during painful contractions; you might need to help with showers, massage, getting drinks and ice. Or she may want you just to be there, quietly holding her hand.

Although you may feel anxious, particularly when she is in obvious pain, it's best to keep your own anxiety about her pain to yourself or perhaps check with the midwife or medical staff if you have serious concerns. Your job at this point is to encourage and provide distraction from the pain.

If you do begin to feel overwhelmed, call on another support person or perhaps the midwife, to stay with her and take a few minutes break.

It's important to never leave her alone, not even for a minute. Most midwives will understand if you need to take 10 minutes out to get some fresh air and pull yourself together, and they will be happy to step in for a while to cover for you.

Preparation

Bags Packed

If you are birthing at hospital, make sure the bags are ready to go and you know exactly where to find them. If you are planning for a home birth, check you know where to locate everything you need.

Car Seat

If you are going to a maternity hospital and need to move from one hospital to another, make sure the car seat is correctly fitted into the car. We would recommend a few practice rounds well before the due date. Many a new, sleep-deprived parent has been defeated by a car seat in the hospital car park. Give yourself the best chance at winning this particular battle.

Food & Drinks

Labour is very unpredictable, so make sure you have a supply of cold drinks and food at home or to take to the hospital, for yourself and the labouring mother.

Pain Relief

TENS machine, hot and cold packs, massage oils, music, faceclothes



BIRTHING PARTNERS

...the role of the birthing partner

During the birth

Moral Support

The labouring women will tell you what she needs. If you're not sure, ask. But don't hound her. Be guided by her mood and fit in with her. Don't be hurt or offended if she says or does something that is out of character or if she is sharp or aggressive with you; it can be hard to keep our manners when we are in pain and exhausted.

Some women want their partner to stand by quietly through each contraction and don't want to be touched at all; other women will find comfort from you stroking her hair, massaging her back or holding her hands tightly.

Some women need constant encouragement and want to hear your voice, others prefer to labour in silence. Eye contact and quiet approval may be all that she needs.

Your biggest role is to provide emotional support, positive encouragement and praise. You will be her cheerleader, reminding her of how far she has come, how well she is doing, how proud you are of her. Now is definitely not the time for any criticism or negativity.

Remember to think back to the birth plan and the things discussed together. Think about the environment (dim lights, music, hydration, heat packs, massage, changing positions).

Massage

The Birth Plan may include a request for massage. Here is some guidance on massage during labour:

Don't Rush Your Massage Strokes

Use gentle, smooth strokes to avoid irritating her. A labouring woman will often find that rushed and choppy strokes are annoying to her. Concentrate on keeping firm pressure and working in long, even lines across her back, belly, hand, foot or leg.

Use Oil or Lotion if Needed

There is nothing more annoying than having your skin rubbed off by rough hands or "burned" from excess friction. Use a good quality massage oil or massage lotion as a lubricant to avoid hurting her skin or irritating her emotions. Remember that a little bit of lotion goes a long way so just use enough to keep from hurting her skin, but not so much that you make her feel greasy and yucky. Using massage oil or massage lotion can be an excellent way to introduce essential oils that can help a labouring mother feel calm, centred or relaxed. Ahead of the birth, check with the mum-to-be which scents and oils she likes.



BIRTHING PARTNERS

...the role of the birthing partner

Be Prepared for a Change in Mind

A labouring woman can change her mind from contraction to contraction, especially as she enters the transition phase of labour. A birth partner should not take this personally, but rather see this as a sign that things are progressing. Let her take control and direct you as to how to help her cope with labour.

A labouring woman may want you to rub her back one second and then tell you not to touch her during the next contraction. Two contractions later she may ask you to massage her feet or legs. A birth partner should just continue to support her and remember that she is working extremely hard. A labouring woman may only use one or two words without typical politeness: "Please massage my leg" might become, "Leg!" during an intense contraction.

Practice Ahead of Time

A birth partner will often have a better idea of what coping techniques a mother finds helpful by seeing what she prefers to use during her everyday stresses. When the labouring woman bumps into a chair what is helpful to her? Firm pressure? Distraction? When the mother has had a very stressful day what helps her unwind? When she gets a regular massage, what techniques and strokes does she find most enjoyable? Knowing some of these answers can help give a birth partner a general place to start. That said, remember the tip above, always stay flexible!

After the Birth

Visitors

After the baby is born, you and the new mum may well be exhausted. Rest and sleep are the priority at this time, to aid recovery and help with the first few days of being new parents.

When the baby is born and you send out your announcements to friends and family, politely say that 'mum and baby' need some rest and that visitors will be invited when you are ready. You then avoid visitors arriving unexpectedly when all the mum wants to do is breastfeed and rest. Be guided by the mother when it comes to who, if and when visitors are allowed.

When you are in the hospital, it is a good idea to put a sign up on the door saying: 'Do not disturb – mum & baby sleeping'. This will prevent cleaners coming into the room to empty rubbish bins or work colleagues barging in to meet the new baby!

Phone Calls, Text Messages & Emails

It is a wonderful time to finally let everyone know that mum and baby are well and announce the arrival of a beautiful baby boy(s) or girl(s) into the world. There is plenty of time to do this, so enjoy the precious time with mum and baby before letting the world know...and don't forget to check with mum before sending out photos. You might think every picture is perfect, but there may be one or two she wishes to keep private!



BIRTHING PARTNERS

...the role of the birth partner

Nourishment for the New Mum

After giving birth and beginning breastfeeding, new mothers declare their hunger loudly! Make sure you have plenty of healthy snacks and drinks available. Hospital food may not be enough, so bring in extra food. Many women need snacks throughout the night to give them energy for night feeds and nappy changes!

Baby Blues

The baby blues usually occur on day three or four after giving birth and is attributed to the sudden, quick change in hormones. The emotional and physical stress of giving birth, along with any general physical discomfort she may be experiencing, can also contribute to her feeling a bit down for the first few days or weeks after birth.

Many new mothers tend to have an increased sense of anxiety because of the new responsibility a baby brings. Not surprisingly, this anxiety can have a negative impact on her mood. The fatigue and lack of sleep that affects all new mothers only serves to compound the problem. She may also be finding it difficult to breastfeed or cope with interrupted sleep.

Symptoms of the baby blues are generally mild and can include crying, mood swings, irritability, anxiety, loneliness, restlessness and impatience. These symptoms should ease quite quickly within a day or so; just try to be patient and understanding during this time. Provide support, listen and be as helpful as you can. If the 'baby blues' do not seem to be disappearing then speak with your partner, they may find it helpful to talk to their LMC or doctor.

How Both Parents Can Get Involved in Caring for Baby

Once bub has arrived, there's plenty of opportunity for doting partners to offer support:

When the baby is delivered, Mum might be busy with the third stage of labour, so be on hand to hold the baby. Skin-to-skin contact is important for both parents to have. Don't be shy - take your shirt off if you want to.

Once your new baby has arrived, take every opportunity to burp and change the baby's nappy. Don't feel discouraged if you need a bit of practice to get it right - Mum may look as if she's sussed it, but she's probably just getting more time to practice than you!

Have lots of skin-to-skin cuddles with the new baby. The baby not only gets tummy time, but you get to bond too.

Help as much as you can around the house to lighten the load on the new mum. If requested, fend off visitors, so Mum can get some rest and have the necessary time to get breastfeeding going.

Be as supportive as possible, particularly if Mum is feeling hormonal, weepy and depressed.

Don't forget to look after yourself. It's normal to have your own struggles, feel a bit left out, anxious, angry or moody. Talk to your partner or your friends and get support.

Acknowledge that you are tired and need to rest too. Don't try to be a superhero!

Claim bath time as your own special time with baby or try bedtime reading and daily walks for quality baby-bonding time.

Put aside some of your own hobbies and enjoy the company of your child while he or she is still young. Golf will still be there, but the baby years will fly past.

USEFUL RESOURCES

Useful Websites

Labour TENS Hire

NatalCare Naturally offer TENS hire anywhere in NZ. They also advise on other natural pain relief methods for before, during and after childbirth.

www.tenshire.co.nz

Practical Parenting

Practical parenting advice for Kiwi families.

www.kiwifamilies.co.nz

Homebirth

The national collective for homebirth groups in New Zealand

www.homebirth.org.nz

Useful Books

Guide to Childbirth by Ina May Gaskin

Natural Birth: A Holistic Guide to Pregnancy, Childbirth & Breastfeeding by Kristina Turner

Active Birth by Janet Balaskas

HypnoBirthing by Marie Mongan

The Birth Partner by Penny Simkin

Music

Birth Bliss – Anna Urbanski



Thank you for taking the time to read our e-book. We wish you a wonderfully, positive childbirth experience.

Please feel free to share this book with your friends, colleagues and clients.

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