

Comfort Measures

Movement – moving around during your labour will help to ensure your baby gets in a good position & help your pelvis to open up, allowing maximum space for baby to come down. Walking, dancing, swaying your hips from side to side or rotating them in a circle. This can also help was pressure on your lower back.

Remember, it's important NOT to lie flat on your back for any length of time during labour

Massage – some women love to be massaged and stroked during labour, it can really help them to feel loved and secure and get the oxytocin flowing. Other women prefer not to be touched at all. That's fine too. You can't predict before your labour what you'll want so just practise your massage techniques beforehand and go with how you are feeling on the day.

The following techniques can be very useful and beneficial in helping you deal with any difficulties during labour:-

Shaking the apples – between contractions - a vigorous rub down the mothers back, bottom and legs to release tension, release adrenaline, get the blood flowing and make her giggle!

Sacral pressure – placing your palms or hands on the sacral area of the lower back during a contraction. Many women find that this is a wonderful way of relieving pressure on the lower back during a contraction.

Hip squeeze – putting pressure on either side of her hip bones to help the baby descend or move into a good position – really only to be used if the baby is needing a bit of help moving down the birth canal

Water – many women really enjoy being in warm water during the labour – either a bath, shower or birth pool. It helps relieve tension and encourages relaxation

Heat and cold – using a hot water bottle placed on the tummy or lower back and / or a cold flannel on the forehead can help relieve pressure and discomfort and keep you feeling cool and relaxed.

Think about other ways to keep your temperature comfortable - water sprays for the face, hand held fan, snuggle socks to keep your feet warm can all be packed in your hospital bag.

Birthing ball - The use of a birthing ball is very common during labour now with most maternity units having them on the ward as standard. You can benefit from using one from early pregnancy right through to after your baby has been born and beyond.

Using the ball throughout pregnancy will help to keep your posture in the correct position, will help get your baby in a good position and will build the strength and flexibility in the supporting muscles in the spine and thighs. It's especially good in late pregnancy, when it can be uncomfortable to sit on hard chairs or get up and down from the sofa.

Aromatherapy – the gentle aroma of aromatherapy oils can be relaxing and comforting during labour. You can use them whilst listening to your MP3s to create a calming trigger. Oils to consider are lavender, rose, Jasmin and Neroli. Clary sage can also be used as it is believed to help speed up a slow labour.

Homeopathy - Homeopathic remedies can be used during labour and will support and promote the physiological process without any harmful side-effects. Useful remedies include Arnica, Caulophyllum, Aconite and pulsatilla.

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Using your mind, thoughts and attention

Distractions are great during labour - if you are focusing your attention on something specific then time will pass more quickly, you're more likely to stay in the present (& not worry about what will happen/what has happened), and your contractions will feel more manageable. By activating different parts of your brain, you are intercepting the nerve impulses from your uterus to your brain, so reducing the intensity of the contractions.

Your special place – choose a special place such as a favourite holiday memory, your garden, being on a beach etc. It should be a place that you have positive associations with & makes you feel happy/loved/relaxed when you think about it. Practice going there in your mind during your pregnancy, so this become easy and instinctive during labour.

Your internal body - You might visualize exactly what is happening inside your body – the long muscles of the uterus reaching down to gently pull open the round muscles of the cervix, the contractions massaging the baby, the baby pressing down and opening the cervix.

Metaphor - some women like to imagine a different scenario that matches the emotions and physical feelings of contractions - for example the waves of the sea crashing against the shore, or a flower opening it's petals.

External focal point – you may prefer to focus your attention externally. (especially if you're not a particularly visual person). You could chose to look at your partner's face, a picture on the wall, a reminder of the baby (perhaps a toy), an object in the room, or even a crack in the plaster. Not a clock though! You don't want to be worrying about time. You can focus on the same thing for several contractions or choose to change your focal point often.

A good way of staying in the moment and also knowing that each contraction only lasts a short time is to focus on a line, such as the edge of a window or lines on a floor board, and follow that line slowly starting at one end and finishing at the other by the time the contraction finishes.

Auditory stimulus - focusing on sounds such as music, the soothing voice of your partner, your MP3s. Get some different playlists together of music/sounds that will appeal to your different moods (ie. more uplifting tracks to keep you distracted during the early stages, spa like music to keep you calm once labour gets more intense).

Many women also naturally use sounds to help them through contractions. When a woman opens her throat, vocalizes, hums, moans, or groans through a contraction, she is also opening her birth canal. It can be a really powerful way of releasing tension and relaxing the body.

Mental activity – a repetitive mental activity can help to distract or focus your thoughts. Counting (such as counting each breath, counting up to 10 and then back down again, counting the seconds of each contraction) or repetitive actions such as repeating a song, a poem or a chant. A repetitive activity such as colouring, knitting or crocheting can also help the mind to focus whilst providing a distraction.