



regarding the ideal labour and birth process and outcome.

- **Put some thought into personalising** and creating a conducive birth environment. Pack in items that will enhance your comfort and make you feel at home.

- **Condition your mind** and create a confident expectancy.

- **Programme yourself** with positive affirmations, address and let go of your fears, and adopt a can-do attitude.

- **Demystify the unknown.** In addition to theoretical info, search YouTube for positive natural birth videos.

- **Invest in practising relaxation** and visualisation techniques so that they'll be second nature when you need them in the birth room.

- **Exercise.** As with all extreme sports, practice and preparation are vital. You will thank your body for the resulting endurance

and muscle tone that will be indispensable during the birthing process.

- **Rehearse breathing techniques** that facilitate comfort during the various phases of labour.

- Together with your birth partner, learn various massage techniques such as comfort-enhancing light touch massage and the perineum stretching and toning perineal massage.

- **Do your kegel exercises** regularly to strengthen your pelvic floor (and keep adult diapers at bay).

- **Rehearse the various positions** that facilitate labour and birth – they require a bit of practice.

## LABOUR AND BIRTH

The main attraction has commenced and your months of preparation are now going to pay off. Here's what you should have in your bag of tricks:

- **A birth support person** – a calm, capable and informed partner who can keep you on track towards your ideal birth, help make you

comfortable, encourage you, remind you of techniques at your disposal and protect you against unnecessary regimental medical procedures.

- **A positive mindset.** Choose to be upbeat and capable in each situation that you're faced with. Embrace – do not resist – the birthing sensations.

## USE YOUR RELAXATION TECHNIQUES:

- **Progressive muscle relaxation**

There are many variations, but in essence the technique starts from either the head or the toes, and gradually focuses on each adjacent section of the body to purposefully release all tension from the body and allow it to loosen and go limp.

- **Breathing** – Different inhale-exhale methods can facilitate the various stages of labour. Ensure that your whole body is tension-free throughout.

- **To facilitate calmness,** relaxation and composure draw a breath in through the nose and fill the abdomen to the count of four, then slowly breathe out to the count of eight. Repeat.

- **To enhance the effectiveness** and reduce the discomfort of contractions draw in a long slow breath through the nose (20 counts) to lift the abdomen in tune with each surge, then exhale steadily and gradually (20 counts). Visualise filling a large helium balloon and then allowing it to drift off into the air.

- **To assist your downward birth** pulsation instincts draw in a short deep breath and exhale purposefully, directing the energy downward.

- **Positions** – the following stances (and combos thereof) are beneficial to the birthing process:

- **Vertical positions** that enable gravity to assist in baby's descent (leaning forward against a wall, back of a chair, or supported by the birth partner).

- **Wide stance or squat positions** that allows the pelvis to spread and open up space in the birth canal (this includes toilet sitting, sitting on a birth ball and the leaping frog position).

- **Hands and knees,** kneeling or lunging positions.

- **Employ items** that facilitate

# RUN-UP TO LABOUR

Thankfully childbirth is not the Hollywood-hyped roller coaster ride depicted in most movies. It normally starts gradually with one or two tell-tail signs. This is an indication that things are really happening, and gives us the time to settle down and practise some coping and comfort techniques. Here are some activities and relaxation measures for the initial phases:

- Firstly, if you're past your due date don't be forlorn. You're not a deciduous product whose best-before date has expired. In this very controlled and scheduled life it is nice to maintain some mystery and allow baby to choose his/her birth date – up to a 42-week term that is.
- Once there's some action don't phone everybody you know and announce that baby's about to arrive. Labour sometimes takes interesting

twists and detours, and you don't need additional pressure to perform like clockwork from a well-meaning but misdirected peanut gallery. The same applies for going to the hospital too early. Your home environment is the most conducive and familiar labour environment. Stay there as long as you're comfortable.

- Try to rest and relax as much as possible through the initial excitement. Sleep if

you can, take a nice warm bath and eat and drink as normal – you'll need the energy later.

- Practise the comfort and relaxation methods you have learnt. Do your breathing, massage and position exercises when you experience a contraction. Use visualisation techniques for mental walk-throughs, get into your rehearsed positions and recite

comfort and provide ambience.

- **Distractions** such as your iPod with your birth music of choice, candles, a favourite quote or picture to focus on, your comfy pillow, and pastimes such as board games, magazines, laugh-out-loud comedies (which releases feel-good hormones and simulates abdominal muscle contractions) are all beneficial.

- **Comfort items** such as aromatherapy/massage oils, massage rollers, hot and cold compresses, a rebozo (an oversized Mexican scarf which has a multitude of labour-enhancing and comfort-facilitating applications) may also help.

- **Activities:** Walking, slow dancing while hanging on to your partner, immersing in a bath /birth pool can help.

- **Consume sufficient food and drink** to stay hydrated and keep up your energy levels.

- **Alternative therapies** such as reflexology and homeopathic remedies can also be considered.

Whether you've been carried through your pregnancy journey on the shoulders of devoted eunuchs, or had to drag yourself ball and chain through its marshes and pitfalls, investing in the knowledge and techniques that facilitate natural childbirth has the power to transform you into wonder wom(b)an, and can magically turn that 'watermelon' into a coveted little cherub. 



## MASSAGE TECHNIQUES:

- **Light-touch massage** employs feathery strokes with the back of finger nails to stimulate the smooth muscles below the skin to contract causing goose bumps and releasing feel-good hormones that promote relaxation.

- **Perineal massage** can be utilised during the crowning phase to stretch the muscles at the end of the birth canal and facilitate the emergence of baby's head.



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