

Breathing Techniques

At the beginning and end of each contraction remember to take a deep, cleansing, relaxing breath. This not only helps sharpen your focus but also provides more oxygen for your baby, your muscles and your uterus.

BREATHING PATTERNS FOR THE FIRST STAGE OF LABOR:



SLOW BREATHING

Begin slow breathing when contractions are intense enough that you can no longer walk or talk through them without pausing. Use slow breathing for as long as you find it helpful. Switch to another pattern if you become tense and can no longer relax during contractions.

LIGHT ACCELERATED BREATHING

Most women feel the need to switch to light breathing at some time during the active phase of labor. Let the intensity of your contractions guide you in deciding if and when to use light breathing. Breathe in and out rapidly through your mouth at about one breath per second.

Keep your breathing shallow and light. Your inhalations should be quiet, but your exhalation clearly audible.



BREATHING TO AVOID PUSHING AT THE WRONG TIME

There will be times throughout both stages of labor when you will want to push or bear down, but it is not the right time. Most women want to hold their breath during these, particularly difficult moments. Avoid holding your breath by breathing in and out constantly or by raising your chin and blowing or panting. This keeps you from adding to the pushing that your body is already doing.



VARIABLE (TRANSITION) BREATHING

This is a variation of light breathing. It is sometimes referred to as “pant-pant-blow” or “hee-hee-who” breathing. Variable breathing combines light shallow breathing with a periodic longer or more pronounced exhalation. Variable breathing is used in the first stage if you feel overwhelmed, unable to relax, in despair, or exhausted.



BREATHING PATTERNS FOR THE SECOND STAGE OF LABOR



EXPULSION BREATHING

Used once the cervix is fully dilated and the second stage of labor has begun a big sigh as soon as the contraction begins. Release all tension as you breathe out. Focus on the baby moving down and out, or on another positive image. Breathe slowly, letting the contraction guide you. Accelerate or lighten your breathing as necessary for comfort. When you cannot resist the urge to push (when it “demands” that you join in), take a big breath, tuck your chin to chest, curl your body and lean forward. Then bear down, while holding your breath or slowly releasing air by grunting or moaning. Most important of all, relax the pelvic floor. Help the baby come down by releasing any tension in the perineum. After 5-6 seconds, release your breath, then breathe in and out. When the urge to push takes over join in by bearing down. How hard you push is dictated by your sensation. You will continue in this way until the contraction subsides. The urge to push comes and goes in waves during the contraction. Use these breaks to breathe deeply providing oxygen to your blood and baby. When the contraction ends, relax your body and take one or two calming breaths.