



Breathing for pregnancy and labour

- When you breathe well it relaxes you and is vital in helping you cope in pregnancy and labour
- This helps oxygenation of the vital organs and helps the release of hormones such as oxytocin and endorphins. Your muscles and organs are nourished and it helps your baby relax and cope with the process of labour
- Typically women will breath-hold or hyperventilate during a contraction if they are not coping well and this increases the discomfort you feel during each contraction
- Breathing during labour is not necessarily about learning breathing techniques, but about becoming relaxed and tuning in to your natural rhythm of breathing
- By having the ability to concentrate and control the rhythm of breathing you are unlocking a powerful tool to help you cope during the peak of contractions, reducing the necessity for further pain relief

- The more you practice this during pregnancy, the more effective it will be. Try to practice at least once a day for 5 minutes.

You may wish to try this breathing awareness exercise to help you prepare:

Sit comfortably on the floor on a folded blanket or cushion to raise your hips. Sit in a cross legged position (unless you have pelvic pain). If this is not comfortable you may wish to kneel, lie on your side or sit in a chair.

- Now relax, close your eyes and allow the tension to melt from your body. Try to feel your spine lengthen and open your chest to allow more space for your baby and your breathing. Be still for a while and allow your breathing to slow right down into your natural rhythm
- When you are ready, touch your sides around your lower ribs with your hands and feel your ribcage expand as you breathe in. Then notice how the ribcage gathers inwards as you breathe out. Continue for 2 – 3 cycles of breathing
- Notice a tiny pause at the end of each in breath and out breath.
- Move your hands so they cradle your lower belly. Notice how as you breathe in, your belly expands like a balloon and deflates as you breathe out. Don't force

the movement – just observe and focus on it. This is natural deep breathing

- Now place your hands on your knees and continue to focus your attention on the in and out breaths and the gentle wave like movements they cause in the chest and in the belly. Allow each in and out breath to be fully completed and reach its natural end. You may feel your baby moving more because of all the extra oxygen!
- Continue for a while keeping your mind concentrated, bringing your attention back to the breath each time you feel your mind wander. Remember you don't need to 'do' this breathing – let it happen by itself and simply observe it.