



## **Pain relief in labour**

Labour involves uterine contractions and dilatation of the cervix (neck of the uterus) followed by the birth of your baby and is – as the word suggests – hard work. It is usually painful due to muscle contractions and nerve stimulation but this is affected by anxiety, fear and the progress of your labour. Be prepared - keep fit and healthy in pregnancy and ask your midwife to explain anything you don't understand.

### **Natural methods of aiding comfort and easing pain in labour**

- In early labour, stay at home as long as possible.
- Keep upright and mobile and try various positions – standing, sitting, leaning over a chair, on all fours, or use a birthing ball. Avoid lying flat as this may slow labour down and affect your baby's heart rate.
- Try distraction – watch TV, read, listen to music, play board games or use hypnosis tapes.
- Stay cool – use a fan, wear an old T-shirt and keep paper knickers ready for when your waters break. You may need socks in case your feet feel cold.
- Sip water to prevent dehydration and nibble small snacks of toast, cereal or porridge to keep your energy levels up.
- A useful breathing technique during contractions is to Sigh Out Slowly (SOS) - focus on breathing out with a big “sigh of relief “.
- Have a warm bath but don't use aromatherapy oils in the bath or birthing pool if your waters have broken.
- Hire a TENS machine and use it from early labour to give it time to work properly (you may not be able to use it in the pool).

- Massage with aromatherapy oils, eg lavender and jasmine, may ease pain, relax you and aid contractions. Use 4 drops in total, blended in 5 ml of grapeseed carrier oil and ask your partner to massage it into your back, shoulders or abdomen, or put in a bowl of warm water to soak your feet.
- Clary sage oil is useful if your contractions are slow but check with your midwife first to ensure that it is safe to use this as it may over-stimulate your contractions if you are already in established labour, which can lead to fetal distress in some cases.
- Don't continuously burn oils or use a vaporiser, as you may become drowsy, nauseous or develop a headache. 10-15 minutes an hour is all you need.
- You can stimulate acupuncture points for pain relief during contractions by asking your partner to press intermittently with his two thumbs in the pairs of dimples either side of your spine, in the small of your back, from your coccyx (tailbone) to your waist, repeating this as you wish.
- Bach flower remedies may ease nerves (Rescue remedy, 4 drops in a glass of water) or tiredness (olive, 2 drops). It's also good for your partner especially if he panics at the first sign of your labour!
- Herbal raspberry leaf tea, to drink or as ice cubes to suck, can help contractions but don't take this if you need a drip to speed up labour.
- Homeopathic remedies should be prescribed for your precise symptoms – it's possible to buy packs with instructions to help you choose the most appropriate remedy, although you should familiarise yourself with these before you start labour as they can be a bit overwhelming. Examples include chamomilla if you "can't bear it any more", caulophyllum if your contractions are short, irregular and flying in all directions, or pulsatilla if your contractions and your mood are changeable – remember, things change quickly during labour so consult a qualified homeopath for best advice.
- If you want to have a private complementary therapist, eg acupuncturist, homeopath or reflexologist, with you during labour discuss this with your midwife well in advance.

Always inform your midwife if you intend using natural remedies or complementary therapies in labour, especially if you need pain relief such as an epidural or a pethidine injection, or a drip to speed up contractions.

For more individualised advice on coping with labour contractions, call Expectancy on **0906 400 6227** (calls charged at £1.50 per minute, from a BT landline; calls from mobiles and other networks may vary).