

Prenatal Relaxation Exercise

Knowing how to relax your body is an important skill that you will use to cope with labour. The more you practice relaxation, the more helpful it will be in managing the hard work of labour and birth. Relaxation can increase your comfort in labour by helping you save energy, increasing your pain tolerance, and by helping your uterus contract well.

A positive mental attitude towards relaxation can help prepare you for labour. Here are a few suggestions:

- Practice relaxation every day in the last months of your pregnancy.
- Try to have realistic expectations of labour and birth. The contractions of active labour may be very hard to handle. Some mothers need and use analgesics (pain medication). Sometimes even a small dose of analgesic along with other coping skills can help a labouring woman to relax.
- Be ready to actively take part in the birth of your baby. Labour is a time of movement, work, and concentration.
- Build your ability to concentrate. Thinking of an external or internal focal point may help. Imagine the beach, a warm bath, or a safe and loving memory. Make this image as detailed as you can. Include smell, taste, touch, and colour.
- Create a positive statement about your ability to labour and repeat it to yourself (e.g., I can relax and labour well).
- Partners need to praise and encourage the expectant mother. The comforting use of touch and massage help most women to relax. Watch her face for signs of tension and remind her to let it go. Help her move to positions in which she is well supported. Check her body for relaxation.

Prenatal Relaxation Practice Session

Relaxation is most useful if you practice every day. You can read this and practice on your own or have your partner guide you. These relaxation exercises are very general. Get into a comfortable position, sitting or lying down on your side. Do **not** drive or operate machinery while practicing relaxation.

- Breathe in gently and relax your body as you breathe out.
- Let your breath be slow and regular. Spend a minute just noticing your breath.
- Gently pull your toes towards your head, feeling your thighs tighten and your calves stretch. Now let go of the tension. Let your knees and feet go soft and heavy.
- Tighten the muscles of your pelvic floor; hold the tension and then release.
- Gently pull your tummy in, hugging your baby or babies . . . *Relax*.
- Notice what is happening to your breathing. As you rest, feel the change in your breathing. Let your breath be slow and even.
- Lift your shoulders to your ears. Let them go and release the tension.
- Raise your eyebrows . . . Frown . . . Now relax and let your forehead be smooth.
- Press your tongue to the roof of your mouth . . . Now let it rest . . .
- Open your mouth like a yawn . . . Now let your jaw fall down . . . *Relax*.
- Gently close your eyes and enjoy the change. Notice your whole body from your toes to your head . . . soft and relaxed.
- Breathe in and out slowly . . . *Relax*.
- Relax your feet and thighs. Let them be soft and heavy.

- Let your tummy muscles relax. Notice your slow, deep, and regular breathing.
- Let your arms go limp and loose. Release your shoulders . . . *Relax*.
- Keep your breathing slow, deep, and comfortable.
- Let the muscles of your face relax more with each breath out.

Continue to breathe in and out slowly. As you relax even further, begin to imagine yourself in a warm, comfortable place with happy memories (this might be a sunny beach, a warm bath, a bed, or floating on water) . . . (pause)

Notice everything clearly. Focus as hard as you can. If your mind wanders, just take a breath and as you breathe out, bring your mind back to your scene.*

Feel the warmth on every part of your body . . . think about how relaxed it is. Notice your breathing . . . and with every breath out relax even further.

Erase the worries from your brow. Keep your eyes relaxed and closed. Let your face be soft and loose. Relax your lips and cheeks . . . let your jaw drop . . . your tongue is loose in your mouth, your lips part slightly. Warm, heavy, comfortable. Feel the warmth spreading throughout your body . . . (pause)

Limp and loose from your shoulders down to your fingers. Feel the warmth and heaviness spreading from your tummy, down through your hips . . . past your knees to your ankles and toes . . . (pause)

Feel your tummy swell as you breathe in. Sigh a little as you breathe out. Release . . . Relax . . . Sink into the mattress or chair and try to become part of it. Pause at the end of each breath out and get to know the feeling of doing nothing at all (limp and loose, warm and heavy, comfortably relaxed) . . . (pause)

Rest and take a few more breaths. Tell yourself that when you open your eyes you will feel refreshed and alert. Slowly open your eyes and stretch.

Prenatal Relaxation Practice Session #2

If you wish, you may add awareness of where you hold tension. Use the practice session up to the * above.

Now, think about yourself in a stressful situation where you are **not** comfortable . . . (pause)
Notice any changes in your breathing . . . Notice where your muscles are tight . . . Relax . . . Release all of those muscles. Let go of the tension . . . Bring your thoughts back again to your warm and comfortable place.

Continue with the rest of the relaxation exercise so that you end with your body feeling relaxed and refreshed.

Please call HEALTHLink Alberta with any questions or concerns

Toll-Free: 1-888-408-5465

Calgary: 403-943-5465