

Breathe to Relax: Helpful for Pregnancy, Labour and Beyond



4500 Oak Street,
Vancouver, B.C.
V6H 3N1

Telephone: 604-875-3557
Fax: 604-875-3708

bcwomens.ca



**BC WOMEN'S
HOSPITAL+
HEALTH CENTRE**

An agency of the Provincial
Health Services Authority

During pregnancy:

Relaxation breathing can:

- ◆ Calm me in times of stress and uncertainty
- ◆ Help my baby to grow
- ◆ Keep my baby growing inside me until I am further along in my pregnancy

During labour:

Relaxation breathing can:

- ◆ Help me relax during and between the pains
- ◆ Keep me from getting very tired early in the labour
- ◆ Lessen the pain of labour
- ◆ Bring oxygen and nutrients to my baby and my uterus (womb)
- ◆ Help my uterus to work better

After the birth:

Relaxation breathing can help me:

- ◆ Feel better
- ◆ Cope with the stress of mothering
- ◆ Get the rest and/or sleep I need with a new baby
- ◆ Breastfeed successfully



How Do I Do Relaxation Breathing:

During pregnancy and after the birth:

Get ready:

- ◆ Set a time aside when you can let yourself relax
- ◆ Get into a comfortable position
- ◆ Use pillows to support your head and neck
- ◆ Listen to some soothing music if you wish
- ◆ Place your hands on your tummy



Then begin:

- ◆ **Breathe in**, a slow, gentle, comfortable breath
- ◆ **Breathe out**, as if you are gently sighing
- ◆ Feel your hands move in and out with your breath
- ◆ Let your shoulders relax a little more with each breath out
- ◆ Listen to the sound of your breath as you breathe out

Allow the sound of your breathing to soothe and comfort you.

Give yourself some time to enjoy these feelings of relaxation.

Breathing for labour

There are four kinds of breathing that can help you in labour:

1. Slow, deep breathing
2. Light breathing (shallow and a little quicker)
3. Panting (very shallow little breaths out)
4. Breathing for pushing

For milder labour pains use slow, deep breathing.

For stronger labour pains use light breathing and/or panting.

1. Slow deep breathing

When do I use this?

- ◆ When “pains” (contractions) become strong enough that you cannot breathe as you usually do. Use this breathing for as long as it is helpful

Use it at the start and end of each “pain” because it helps to:

- ◆ Relax you as the “pain” begins and releases tension as the “pain” ends
- ◆ Alert your partner that a “pain” is about to begin or end
- ◆ Give your baby and uterus (womb) more oxygen at the start and end of each “pain”

How do I do this?

- ◆ **Breathe in** through your nose or mouth with a slow, gentle, comfortable breath
- ◆ **Breathe out** through your nose or mouth as if you are gently sighing
- ◆ Let your shoulders relax a little more with each out breath
- ◆ Listen to the sound of your breath as you breathe out



2. Light breathing

When do I use this?

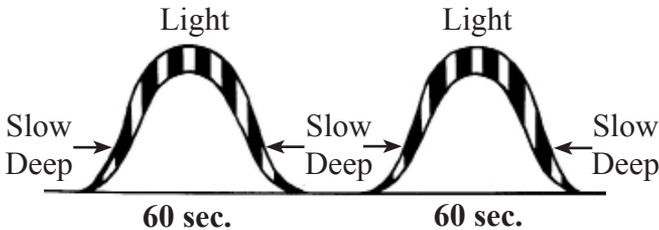
- ◆ At the peak of, or during any “pain” when slow deep breathing is no longer helping

How do I do this?

- ◆ **Breathe in** and **out** through your mouth (as if you were slightly out of breath and had just climbed a set of stairs)
- ◆ Make a slight sound with your breath out

Practice Hint:

- ◆ Place your hands over your ribs
- ◆ Feel your hands move with your breath



3. Panting

When do I use this?

- ◆ Before your cervix has opened completely and you have an urge to push
- ◆ When your baby's head is about to be born

Why is this breathing important?

- ◆ Panting will help keep you from holding your breath and pushing

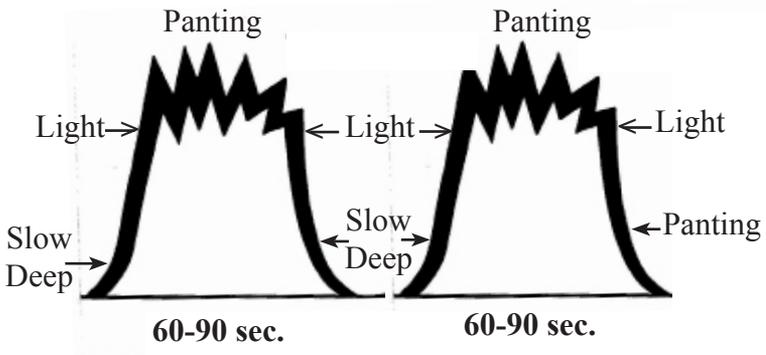


How do I do this?

- ◆ Point your chin up towards the ceiling
- ◆ Start with a soft breath out through your mouth like a little puff
- ◆ You may find it helps to repeat a word like “Blow” “Blow” “Blow” or “Out” “Out” “Out”

Practice Hint:

- ◆ Place one hand over your chest just below your neck
- ◆ Feel the movement of your hand as you breathe



Note: If you start feeling short of breath, light headed or dizzy or have tingling in your fingers, feet or around your mouth you have probably been breathing too rapidly and too deeply (hyperventilating). If this happens breathe slowly and gently into your cupped hands or a paper bag.

4. Breathing for Pushing

When do I use this?

- ◆ When your cervix is fully dilated and you have a strong urge to push.

How do I do this?

Be natural: allow your body to tell you what to do.

- ◆ Try changing positions
- ◆ Make grunting or moaning noises as you push if you want
- ◆ Push when you have the urge to push

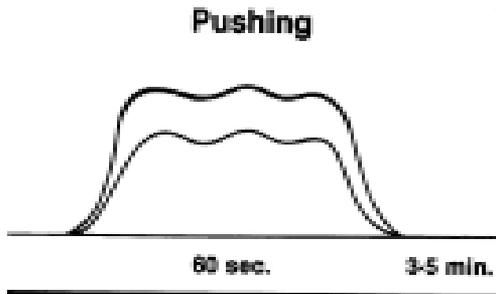


(You may have several urges to push in each contraction. Urges last about 5 seconds.)

- ◆ Push as you breathe out
- ◆ When pushing only hold your breath for 5 – 6 seconds

If you don't have a strong urge to push:

- ◆ Be patient and rest
- ◆ Your caregivers will coach you



What else will help me push my baby out?

- ◆ Let your legs drop apart – ask your nurse to keep you covered with a sheet, if you wish
- ◆ Let the muscles in your bottom become loose and sink into the bed
- ◆ Ask for hot compresses for your bottom – this helps to soothe the pain and soften the muscles in the area
- ◆ Soften the muscles around your mouth by dropping your mouth open and letting your shoulders drop down
- ◆ Think of pushing your baby down, forward and out into the light
- ◆ Keep your eyes open and focus on the person who is supporting you best through this part of your baby’s birth

What if I need more help with learning relaxation breathing?

- ◆ Ask your nurse or the prenatal educator to help you
- ◆ Look in Baby’s Best Chance

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Antepartum Family Education Committee

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