

Body Awareness Techniques

Tensing and Releasing the Whole Body

Starting position: Lie down in a comfortable position.

Exercise: Tighten the muscles of your entire body- stiffen your abdomen, hips, and legs, then your back, neck, and arms. Keep the muscles contracted for about five seconds. Pay attention to how you feel: for example, tense, tight, cramped, or uncomfortable.

Then let your whole body go limp, releasing the tension all over. You may start by relaxing your abdomen and releasing toward your arms, legs, and head. Think of the tension flowing out of your limbs. Breathe slowly. Sigh, relaxing even more. Feel yourself relaxing as you breathe out.

Practicing with Your Partner

While you are developing an awareness of tension and relaxation, your birth partner should also learn to recognize when you are tensed and relaxed. He or she can detect signs of tension in several ways:

- By observing you when you are tense and when you are relaxed. How do you look when you are anxious, uncomfortable, calm, content, or asleep?
- By touching or feeling various parts of your body (arms, legs, neck, and face.) How do your muscles feel? Hard or soft?
- By lifting one of your arms or legs, supporting it well, and moving the joints and feeling the looseness and heaviness that accompanies relaxation. How does the limb feel to your partner when it is being moved? A relaxed arm or leg should neither help nor resist movement.

The way your partner checks you for relaxation has a lot to do with your ability to relax. If he or she handles you in a more gentle way- not dropping, shaking, or pinching your limbs- you will develop a sense of confidence and security. This trusting relationship carries over beautifully into labor. As you practice together you will learn which parts of your body are the most difficult to relax (your 'tension spots'). Find out what eases the tension in these areas. Is it touch, massage, verbal reminders, or warmth?

Once you and your partner are skilled in spotting tension and relaxing, practice by deliberately tightening a limb and have your partner try to detect the part you have tensed. Try contracting the muscles most likely to be tense during labor (buttocks, thighs, back, shoulders, face, or fists). Once your partner has found the tension, have him or her help you relax.

How I Express Tension

Each individual will show specific signs of physical/ emotional tension and anxiety. Listed below are several. Circle the ones that apply to you.

1. I feel tension in my:
 - a. facial muscles
 - b. neck muscles
 - c. shoulders and upperback
 - d. lower back
 - e. arms and hands
 - f. legs and feet
- 2.. My hands are cold.
3. I clench my teeth.
4. I develop a headache.
5. My hands are sweaty.
6. I feel flushed or warm.
7. I have 'butterflies' in my stomach.
8. I bite my nails.
9. My mouth becomes dry.
10. My hands and legs shake.

Other areas or ways I show tension.._____

How I Relieve Tension

Circle the methods you use to relieve mental and physical tension. After each choice write any specifics that may help.

Sounds-

- Music-
- Nature-
- Silence-

Sight-

- Eyes Open-
- Eyes Closed-
- Colors-
- Nature-
- Visualizations-

Touch-

- Massage-
 - Where?
 - What strength?
 - What technique?
- Stroking-
 - Where?
 - What strength?
 - What technique?
- Holding hands-
- Cuddling-
- Hugs-

Meditation/ Prayer-

Television/ Radio-

Computer/ Video Games-

Reading/ Writing-

Bath/ Shower-

Walk/ Jog-

Other Exercise-

Sleep/ Rest-

Other ideas.. _____
