

# Relaxation Techniques

## Touch Relaxation

With touch relaxation, you respond to your partner's touch by relaxing or releasing tense muscles. During labor use your coach's touching, stroking, or massaging as a nonverbal cue to relax.

*Starting position:* Lie down on your side or sit in a comfortable position.

*Exercise:* Contract a set of muscles and have your partner touch those muscles with a firm relaxed hand, molding his/her hand to the shape of the part of your body being tensed. Release the muscle tension and relax toward your partner's hand. Imagine the tension flowing out of your body. Your partner can use several types of touch listed below. Find out which types you prefer, but practice all methods, since your preference could change during labor.

Still touch. Your partner holds his/her hand(s) firmly in place until he or she feels you release your tension.

Firm pressure. Your partner applies pressure with fingertips or the whole hand on the tense area. Your partner gradually releases the pressure. You respond by releasing tension as you feel your partner's gradual release.

Stroking. Your partner lightly or firmly strokes the tense area. When stroking your arms or legs, your partner strokes away from the center of the body.

Massage. Your partner firmly rubs or kneads tense muscles. This is commonly used for the neck and back rubs, but any muscle group can be massaged.

Practice tensing the following muscle groups :scalp, face, neck, shoulders, arms and hands, abdomen, buttocks, legs and feet; then releasing to your partner's touch. Learn to release with all the methods listed above.

## Passive Relaxation

Once you can recognize tension in your muscles, the next step is to master the art of releasing tension.

Have your partner read this exercise to you slowly, in a calm relaxed voice. There is many relaxation tapes/cds available if your partner is not available.

Find a comfortable position lying on your side or semi-sitting, with your head and your limbs supported by the floor or bed and pillows. Take plenty of time to get comfortable as you can so you do not need to use muscle effort to hold yourself in position.

1. Take a long sigh, or yawn.
2. Now focus way down to your toes and feet. Just let go. Think how warm and relaxed they feel.
3. Think about your ankles- floppy and loose. Your ankles are very relaxed and comfortable.

4. And now your calves. Let those muscles go- loose and soft.
5. Now focus on your knees. They are supported and relaxed- not holding your legs in any position. Your knees are very comfortable and loose.
6. Think of your thighs. The large, strong muscles of your thighs have let go. They are soft and heavy, and your thighs are totally supported.
7. And now your buttocks and perineum. This area needs to be especially relaxed during labor and birth. Just let go. Think soft and yielding. When the time is right, your baby will make the journey down the birth canal, and the tissues of your perineum will open and let the baby slide out. You will release, allowing the perineum to give and open for the baby.
8. And now your lower back. Imagine that someone with strong, warm hands is giving you a lovely rub. It feels good. Your muscles relax to the imagined touch, and your lower back is comfortable. Feel the warmth. Feel the tension leaving.
9. And now let your thoughts flow to your abdomen. Let those muscles go. Let your abdomen rise and fall as you breathe in and out. Your abdomen is free. Focus on how it moves as you breathe. Focus on your baby within your abdomen. Your baby is floating or wiggling in the water in your womb- a safe and interesting place where you are meeting all your baby's needs for nourishment, oxygen, warmth, movement, and stimulation. Your baby hears your heartbeat, your voice, your partner's voice, and all the interesting sounds of the outside. What excellent care you are giving your baby! You are a wonderful mother.
10. And now your chest. Your chest is free. As you breathe in, bringing air into your lungs, your chest swells easily, making room for the air. As you breathe out, your chest relaxes to help the air flow out. Breathe easily and slowly, letting the air flow in and out, almost like sleep breathing. This easy breathing helps you relax more. The relaxation helps you breathe even more easily and slowly. Now try breathing in through your nose and out through your mouth- slowly and easily, letting the air flow in and out. At the top of the in-breath, you notice just a little tension in your chest, which is released with your out-breath. Listen as you breathe out. It sounds relaxed and calm, almost as if you were asleep. Every out-breath is a relaxing breath. Use your out-breaths to breathe away any tension. This is very much like slow breathing which you may use during labor.
11. And now your shoulders. Imagine you have just had a lovely massage over your shoulders and upper back. Let go. Release. Feel the warmth. Feel the tension slip away.
12. Focus on your arms. With your out-breath, let your arms go limp- from your shoulders all the way down to your arms, to your wrists, hands, and fingers. Heavy, loose, and relaxed.
13. And now your neck. All the muscles in your neck are soft because they do not have to hold your head in any position. Your head is heavy and completely supported, so your neck can just let go and relax.

14. Focus on your lips and jaw. They are slack and relaxed. You do not have to hold your mouth closed or open. It is comfortable. No tension there.
15. And now your eyes and eyelids. You are not holding your eyes open or closed. They are the way they want to be. Your eyes are unfocussed and still beneath your eyelids. Your eyelids are relaxed and heavy.
16. Focus on your brow and scalp. Think how warm and relaxed they are. Just let go. You have a calm, peaceful expression on your face, reflecting a calm, peaceful feeling inside.
17. Take a few moments to note and enjoy this feeling of calm and well-being. You can relax this way anytime- before sleep, during an afternoon rest, or during any quiet break. This is the feeling to have in labor. During labor allow yourself to relax all muscles that are not required to hold whatever position you are trying.
18. Now it is time to end this relaxation session. No need to rush. Gradually open your eyes, stretch, tune in to your surroundings, and get up slowly.

### Relaxation Countdown

This is a quicker version of passive relaxation. May be used to get to sleep, back to sleep, or in between contractions.

Breathe in through your nose. As you breathe out through your mouth, release the tension throughout your body. At first, use five slow breathes to accomplish this, relaxing a different area with each breath. Then try to relax all areas on the slow exhalation of one breath. Think of this countdown as a wave of relaxation that passes down through your body from head to toe:

5. Head, neck, and shoulders
4. Arms, hands, and fingers
3. Chest and abdomen
2. Back, buttocks, and perineum
1. Legs, feet, and toes

As you practice, use as many breaths as you need to count down to total body relaxation.

