

# Relaxation Techniques

## Attention-Focusing

During labor contractions, it will help to have your attention focused on something.

### Internal focus:

Many women prefer an internal focus. For example, some women close their eyes and visualize the effect of contractions- the uterine muscle pulling the cervix open and the baby pressing down and further opening the cervix. Other women prefer images that are calming and pleasant (the beach, the mountaintop, or a happy memory). Some women visualize themselves as being “above” their contractions (like a gull soaring over a stormy sea), while remaining in touch with the contractions. Still others visualize each contraction as a hurdle to overcome (a steep hill to be climbed, a footrace, a wave to ride, and so on).

### External focal point:

You may also find it helpful to look at something. You may wish to look at your partner’s face, a picture on the wall, a reminder of the baby (ultrasound picture, baby clothes, baby toy), an object in the room, a flower, or the view from the window. Some women focus on the same thing for many contractions; others change focal points often. Some focus on a line, such as a window, and follow that line visually during the contraction.

### Tactile focus:

Many women find it useful to focus on touch. Examples may include a partner’s rhythmic massage, stroking of one area of the body, or a tight embrace.

### Auditory Focus:

Other women focus on sounds. Examples include listening to a favorite musical recording, the soothing voice of a birth partner, repeated rhythms, or a recording of environmental sounds such as surf, rain, or a babbling brook. Many women find it helpful to vocalize in a rhythmic pattern by moaning, sighing, counting their breaths, singing, reciting poems and verses, or chanting.

### Mental activity:

Some women focus quietly while thinking the words of a song, poem, or a verse made up on the spot. For example, one second time mother said to herself as each contraction built to a peak, “I think I can, I think I can.” As each contraction subsided she repeated, “I thought I could, I thought I could.”

### Physical activity:

Some women perform a physical activity during contractions. These include breathing in a complex pattern, moving by rocking, swaying, walking, dancing, massage, and stroking.

