

Breathing Techniques for Labor and Birth

Benefits/Purpose of Breathing Techniques

- Provides Oxygen- to mother, baby, and hard working uterus. Well oxygenated muscles function more effectively and efficiently.
- Reduces Pain.
- Relaxation- Rhythmic breathing promotes physical relaxation by reducing muscle tension, and promotes emotional relaxation by reducing anxiety.
- Distraction- by helping the mother concentrate and focus on breathing instead of her contractions.

When to Begin Breathing Techniques...

- When you can no longer talk and walk through contractions.
- When you feel anxiety and stress by your physical sensations.
- When you need to focus your mind off of contractions.
- When you need to achieve a higher level of relaxation.

Always start with the simplest technique. When the simplest technique no longer works move on to the next. Some woman may use one technique for their whole labor while others will use all of them.

With Every Breathing Technique...

- Take a cleansing breath at the beginning and end of the technique.
- Release all muscle tension. Melt into your position.
- Think positive, peaceful, calming, and strengthening thoughts and/or visualizations.
- Focus on releasing physical and emotional tension with every out breath.
- If wanted use movement- walk, sway, rock, bounce.
- If wanted make low noises- chant, sing, or moan on exhale.

Cleansing Breath (aka Organizing Breath)

The Purpose- To give a boost of oxygen, focus you on the breathing technique, promote physical/ emotional relaxation, and acts as signal to your coach that your contraction is beginning/ending.

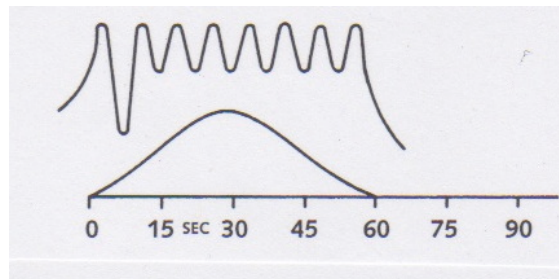
When- Use this technique at the beginning of a contraction, before you start a breathing pattern and at the end of a contraction, after your breathing pattern.

How- Take in a deep inhale filling your lungs as full as you can, and release/exhale with a sigh or yawn.

Breathing Techniques for First Stage Labor

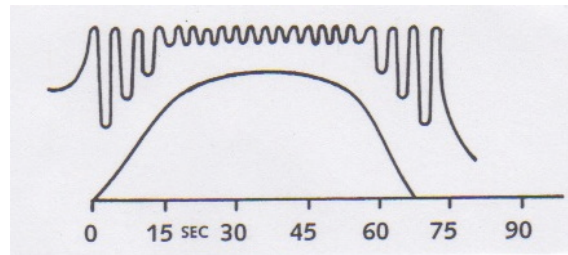
Slow Breathing (aka Relaxed Chest Breathing, Abdominal Breathing)

Begin by doing one cleansing breath. Inhale slowly and comfortably. Exhale slowly and comfortably through your mouth with slightly pursed lips. This breathing is very comfortable, relaxed and similar to the breathing you do when you sleep. End your breathing technique with a cleansing breath.



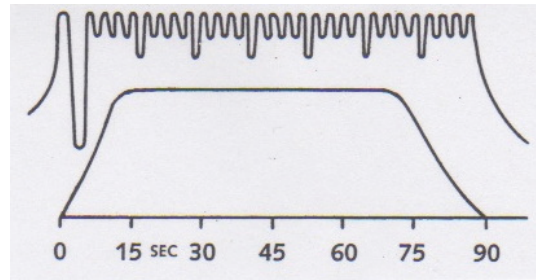
Light Breathing (aka Hee Hee Breathing)

Begin by doing one cleansing breath. Start your breathing like slow breathing and as the contraction intensifies your breathing becomes quicker and shallower. Let your contraction guide the rate of your breathing. Making noise during the exhale helps relieve tension and creates more focus. If you choose to make noise, keep it a low noise like 'heeee' or 'hooo'. As your contraction subsides, return breathing back to the slow breathing technique. End your breathing technique with a cleansing breath.



Patterned Breathing (aka Hee-Blow Breathing, Lamaze Breathing)

Begin by doing one cleansing breath. Breath in quick and shallow breathes. For three exhales make a quick 'hee' noise, one exhale make a slow "hoo" noise. Repeat three quick, shallow 'hees' and one slower "hoo" until contraction subsides. End your breathing technique with a cleansing breath.



Variable Breathing (aka Transitional Breathing, Take Charge Routine)

Begin by doing a cleansing breath. This is just like patterned breathing except that you vary anywhere from one to four 'hee' exhales with one 'hoo' exhale. For the take charge routine the coach tells you how many 'hee' breathes to take per 'hoo' by holding up a finger for a 'hee' breath and fist for a 'hoo' breath. End your breathing technique with a cleansing breath.

Breathing Techniques for Second Stage Labor

Pant-Blow

This breathing technique is used when it is necessary to keep from pushing. This may happen if you get a strong urge to push before full dilation, as your baby's head is crowning, or when your caregiver feels it is needed.

This is the only breathing technique that you do not do a cleansing breath at the start.

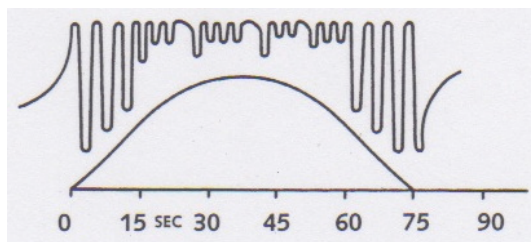
Breathe as if blowing out a candle over and over again, use quick shallow blows until urge to push subsides. End with a cleansing breath.

With Every Push...

- Curl around your baby by tucking your chin and curling your shoulders forward.
- Release tension in your bottom, perineum, and thighs.
- Visualize baby easily moving down and out.
- Completely relax your body in-between pushing efforts.
- Breath normal in-between pushing efforts

Spontaneous Bearing Down (aka Expulsion Breathing)

Breathe comfortably until the urge to push becomes irresistible. Next take a deep breath and hold it or slowly release it while bearing down for 5-7 seconds. After bearing down, release any remaining oxygen and breathe comfortably until the next strong urge- then repeat. You may bear down 2-4 times in one contraction. End with a cleansing breath. Some women find it helpful to grunt, moan, or make low noises while bearing down.



Directed Pushing (aka Hospital Pushing)

This breathing technique is common if the mother has no or low urge to push.

Breathe comfortably until your caregiver asks you to push. Next take a deep breath and hold it or slowly release it while bearing down for 5-7 seconds. After bearing down, release any remaining oxygen. Take a breath or two and repeat until caregiver asks you to rest. End with a cleansing breath.

Prolonged Pushing (aka Purple Pushing)

This technique is not recommended for it is linked to maternal low blood pressure, fetal distress, and a higher incidence of a tear/ episiotomy.

This technique is directed pushing except the mother is asked to hold her breath for 10 seconds or more while bearing down.