Physiotherapy advice for labour

Information for Patients

Women’s Health Physiotherapy

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If you require this information in an alternative format, for example: Braille, audio, large print or another language then please inform staff at your consultation, or ring the number for further information given on the back of this leaflet.
Introduction

The information in this leaflet should help you to be comfortable, calm, active and positive during your labour.

First stage of labour

During this stage, the womb contracts or tightens to draw the cervix open. Initially, contractions last a short time. The contractions will gradually get stronger, longer, and more intense with an element of pain or discomfort. You may react by becoming anxious and tense. Work positively to relax, save energy and be more in control.

Signs of tension

1. Tightness in your upper body
   - Shoulders have a tendency to draw up to your ears
   - Hands want to grip
   - Jaw - you will want to clench your teeth

2. A change in your breathing
   - A tendency to breathe more quickly
   - A strong desire to hold your breath or panic breathe
Strategies to reduce tension

1. Reduce tension in your upper body
   - Pull your shoulders down, away from your ears making your neck longer
   - Stretch your fingers wide, then stop and relax.
   - Allow your jaw to relax

2. Focus on your breathing
   - Keep your breathing low and slow.
     Try breathing in and out for a count of four.
   - Concentrate on sighing out slowly (SOS)
   - If in doubt, breathe out.

   Practise this regularly

3. Get in to a comfortable position
   Leaning forwards with support will always help to reduce tension and keep your breathing under control.

   There are some positions to try on pages 5 to 9.

4. Rocking
   Rocking is soothing and rhythmical and can help you to maintain a slow breathing pattern.

5. Massage
   Slow, circular movement over the back can decrease tension and have a positive effect on pain.
At the end of each contraction
- Finish with a long sigh out
- Check for signs of tension
- Walk as frequently as possible and change position often between contractions
- Distraction may be helpful; you could read a book or listen to music

A practice contraction
Why not put all these tips together and practise
- try one of the suggested positions
- start with a slow sigh out
- check for any signs of tension
- concentrate on the gentle flow of your breathing, combining it with rocking
- Your birth partner may practise massaging your back
- Finish with a final sigh out
Suggested positions for comfort

Lean forward onto the kitchen work surface

hands and knees
lean over your partner

Sitting on the ball
Lean over the ball

‘Cowboy sit’ over the back of the chair
Relaxed leaning forward with pillow support
Exercises should be carried out strictly as instructed by your physiotherapist. Should you not carry out these exercises as recommended or not do them as regularly as you have been requested to you do so at your own risk and the Trust accepts no liability for such misuse.
Would you like to comment on this leaflet?

Meeting the needs and preferences of patients and carers is at the centre of everything we do. We hope that you found this leaflet useful and informative. If you would like to comment on it, please contact Women’s Health Physiotherapy, The York Hospital, Wigginton Road, York, YO31 8HE or telephone (01904) 725389.

Teaching, Training and Research

Our Trust is committed to teaching, training and research to support the development of staff and improve health and healthcare in our community. Staff or students in training may attend consultations for this purpose. You can opt-out if you do not want trainees to attend. Staff may also ask you to be involved in our research.

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

The York based team can be contacted on 01904 726262, or via email at pals.york@york.nhs.uk

The Scarborough based team can be contacted on 01723 342434, or via email at pals.scarborough@york.nhs.uk

Answer phones are available out of hours.
Our Commitment to You

Our ultimate objective is to be trusted to deliver safe, effective healthcare to our community. You can find further details on our website: www.york.nhs.uk.

If you require further information please contact Women’s Health Physiotherapy on telephone number: 01904 725389.

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Date of Issue November 2008
Review Date December 2015
Version 2 (issued December 2013)
Approved By Women’s Health Physiotherapy Team
Obstetrics and Gynaecology Clinical Governance Group

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