



Preparing for labour

Normal labour is painful, but many women find that the techniques mentioned below help them to cope with the pain of labour and reduce the use of drugs for pain relief. Having encouraging and supportive people caring for you is also very important.

Things you can do to prepare for labour

Women use all kinds of things to help them to prepare for labour. The following methods are not necessarily supported by evidence but some women find them helpful.

The things you can try include:

- yoga
- relaxation exercises
- hypnotherapy – a state of relaxation, and
- childbirth education – for you and your support person.

Choose your support people

Your labour and the birth of your baby are a very personal and special time for you. Although you will be supported by the midwife throughout labour, it is important to have another support person with you, usually your partner or another person you are close to. Some women have more than one support person. Choose support people who you will be comfortable with, and who will help you rather than distract you during the different stages of labour. If you have too many people with you, it may affect your ability to cope with the progress of your labour.

Your support person can:

- massage your back
- get ice for you to suck if you are thirsty
- place cool face washers on your forehead
- place a hot pack on your back
- support you in upright & active positions
- help to make you physically comfortable
- encourage your breathing techniques
- offer emotional support
- provide positive encouragement.

Being active through your labour and birth can help you to manage and to take control. Some techniques for managing pain have been well researched while others have been adopted by women and cultures through generations. They may not be proven ways to manage pain but women find them very effective. We encourage you to try methods that suit you.

What you can do

There are a number of things you can do to help you through your labour:

- choose your support people carefully
- relax between the contractions
- keep taking fluids to prevent dehydration
- keep a positive frame of mind
- use a TENS machine (Trans electrical nerve stimulation). You need to contact the physiotherapy department if you are interested in this method before you go into labour
- use intradermal water injections for back pain
- use a variety of positions during labour such as: standing, walking, lying on your side, leaning on your partner or support person or on a bean bag or squatting. Your midwife may suggest you try different positions as labour progresses.
- have a warm bath or shower
- place a hot pack over the area where you feel most pain
- have someone give you a massage
- listen to music- acts as a distraction to the pain of contractions
- use aromatherapy (Concentrated essential oils added to massage oil or oil burner)
- dim the lights in your room
- use your breathing as a focus
- use visualisation – positive imagery to assist relaxation
- acupuncture
- hypnotherapy-using hypnosis as state of relaxation, to achieve changes in psychological aspects of pain and anxiety.

Where to get more information

Women's Health Information Centre (Victoria only)

Royal Women's Hospital

Tel: (03) 8345 3045 or 1800 442 007 (rural callers)

Email: whic@thewomens.org.au

Related fact sheets

- Herbal and traditional medicines and breastfeeding
- Herbal and traditional medicines and pregnancy