



Active birth

Active birth is when you are upright, moving your body and using different positions in labour and birth. It can help with managing contractions, the baby's position and improving the progress of your labour.

Benefits of active birth

Being active through your labour and birth can help you manage pain and take ownership of your birth experience. Some of the active birth techniques have been well researched while others have been used for generations. We can help you try methods that suit you.

Active birth can help you feel confident and to trust your body. Labour includes strong sensations that some people find painful. However, many people find active birth helps them work better with their body. It can help you need less pain relief medicine.

Active birth can help with:

- shorter labour
- less painful labour
- more satisfying labour
- better oxygen flow to your baby
- letting gravity help your baby descend and your cervix dilate
- involving your support person during the birth. A support person is your partner or someone who can help you.



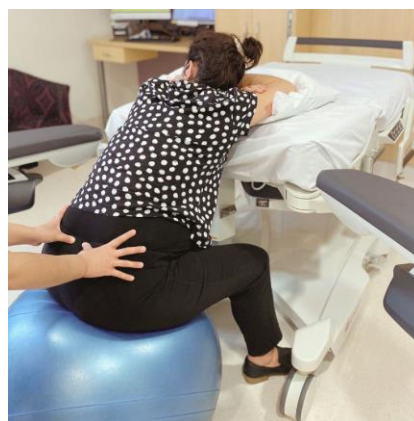
Things you can do to prepare for labour

You can use all kinds of things to help get ready for labour, such as:

- childbirth education for you and your support person
- yoga, Tai Chi, belly dancing
- pregnancy exercise programs
- relaxation exercises, like breathing and visualisation to help you feel relaxed.
- when you're pregnant you could take a hypnotherapy class, like Hypnobirthing or Calmbirth® these can help you manage strong feelings of pain and anxiety during labour.

There are things you can do to enhance your active labour. You can do these at home or in the hospital:

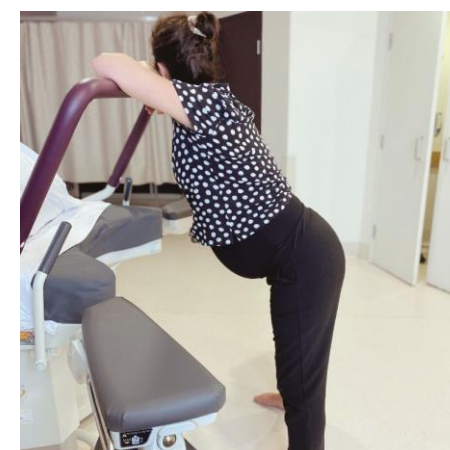
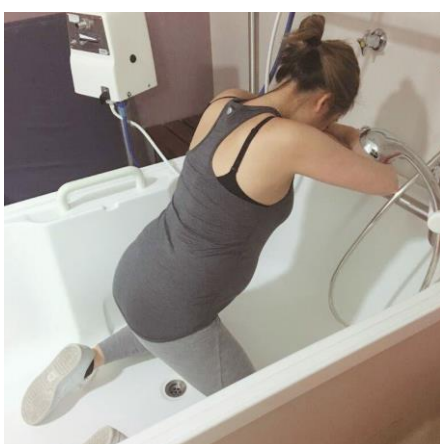
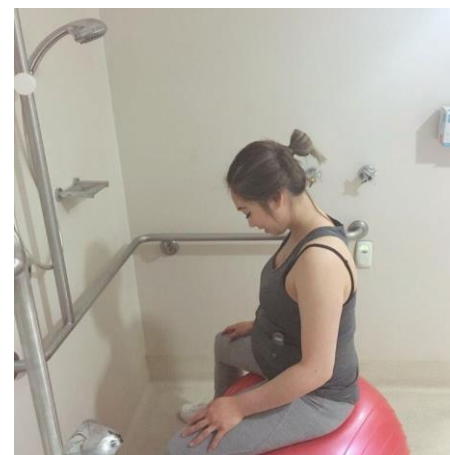
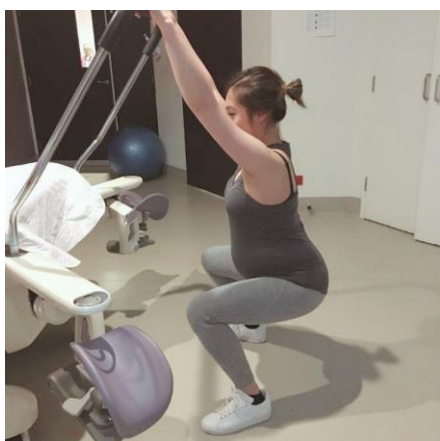
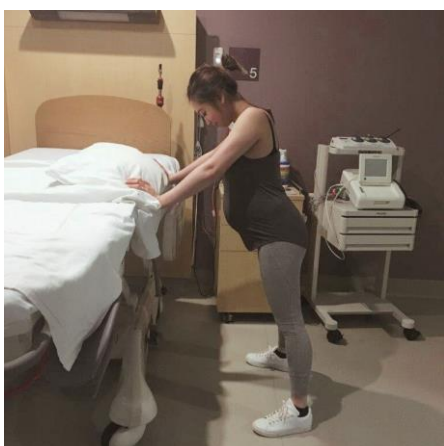
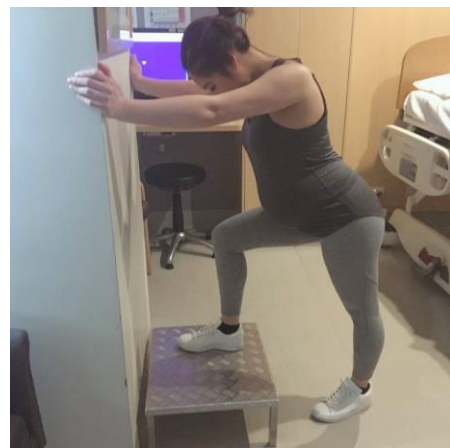
- use a TENS machine. It sends small electric currents through your skin to help relieve pain.
- you can also have water injections for back pain relief. We can give you these injections when you are in the hospital.



Active labour positions

You can use a variety of positions during labour. Active labour positions could be:

- standing, walking or squatting
- rocking, rolling or swinging your hips
- leaning on your support person or over a counter or bed
- sitting, bouncing or leaning on a beanbag or fit ball
- having a warm bath or shower.



Choosing your support people

Your labour and the birth of your baby is a very personal and special time. Although you'll be supported by the midwife during your labour, it's a good idea to have a support person with you. Some people have more than one support person.

Choose support people who you feel comfortable with, and who will help you. You don't want someone who will distract you during your labour.

If you have too many people with you, it might make it hard for you to focus on what you need to do.

What your support person can do

- massage your back
- get you water or ice
- reheat heat packs at home
- place cool face washers on your forehead
- help you get into different positions
- help make you physically comfortable
- give you praise and positive encouragement
- give you emotional support
- encourage your breathing techniques and breathe with you.

Other things you can do to enhance your wellbeing

You can:

- use breathing or relaxation techniques
- use a heat pack on the part of your body where you feel pain
- have someone massage your head, neck, back or where you feel pain or tension
- use soothing essential oils for massages, in a diffuser or on your pillow
- use acupressure on specific body points, for example on your lower back
- listen to your favourite music. Music can help your body produce hormones that help your labour progress and reduce your pain.
- drink fluids

- keep positive
- dim the lights in your room - being in the dark may help you rest and stay calm
- use visualisation to promote calmness and reduce anxiety. You can bring photos of happy moments, positive messages and quotes to the hospital.

During the second stage of labour

When you are birthing your baby, we call this the second stage of labour. We will help you to use a position that you want, if it's safe.

Pushing while lying on your back might slow the contractions and make pushing more difficult. You might want to try these positions instead:

- kneeling on the floor and leaning over the bed
- lying on your side on the bed in a sitting position
- facing the back of the bed and kneeling.

A birth bar can help you in these positions.

Sometimes it may be advised you lie on your back or side. These positions may be recommended if you have had an epidural or we are going to assist the birth of your baby with vacuum or forceps.

Related factsheets

Practising perineal massage during your pregnancy

For more information

The Women's Childbirth Education Department

(03) 8345 2143 (part-time)
childbirth.ed@thewomens.org.au

The Women's Childbirth education videos
thewomens.org.au/patients-visitors/cbe

Family Violence Support

1800 Respect National Helpline

Support for people impacted by sexual assault, domestic or family violence and abuse.

1800 737 732 (24-hour support service)

1800respect.org.au

Do you need an interpreter?



Interpreter

If you need an interpreter, you can ask for one.

Disclaimer: This fact sheet provides general information only. For specific advice about your or your baby's healthcare needs, you should seek advice from your health professional. The Royal Women's Hospital does not accept any responsibility for loss or damage arising from your reliance on this fact sheet instead of seeing a health professional. If you or your baby require urgent medical attention, please contact your nearest emergency department. © The Royal Women's Hospital 2024