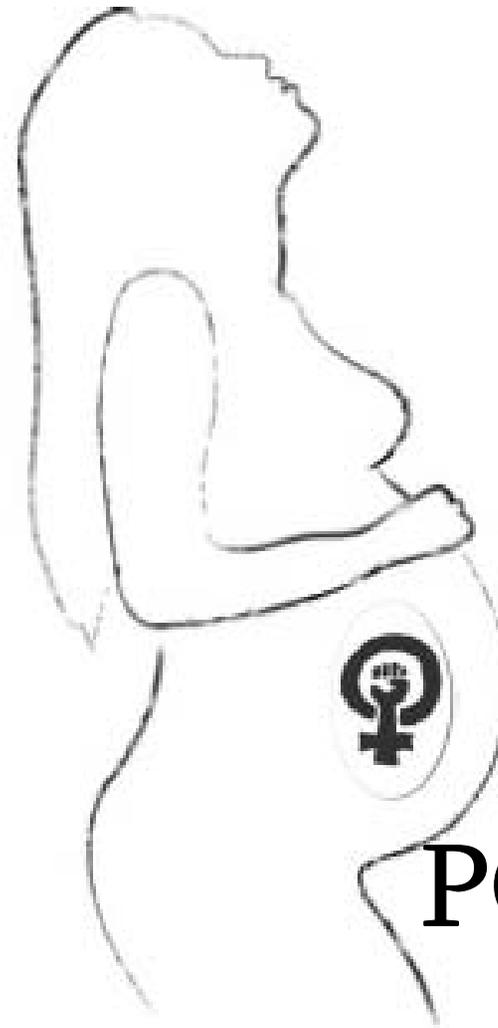




Stelle taught Bradley Method childbirth classes for eight years, has coached several births and has five children, four birthed in hospital and one at home.



# BIRTH as POWER



The Bloom Collective is an infoshop and lending library providing resources for promoting radical social change: books, DVDs, zines, events and a safe space to build radical community.

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## Options and Preparation for Organic Childbirth

**W**as a time when childbirth was the realm of women. Doctors didn't deliver babies; mothers gave birth. The babies came when they were ready, working within their mothers' bodies and the strongest muscle in the human body, male or female, the uterus.

When the industrial revolution and advances in the Western medical model collided within patriarchal society, the process—and power—of birth was taken away from women. Childbirth was moved from the home to the hospital. Science scoffed at the midwife and deified the OB-GYN. By mid-twentieth century, nearly every birth in America was in hospital, under the influence of heavy drugs and ensconced in unhealthy, disempowering rituals, i.e. interventions such as shaving of pubic hair, extreme episiotomy and forceps.

In the 70s, women revolted. They demanded natural births, the presence of partners during delivery and the absence of drugs and unnecessary interventions. But by the 90s, that movement was for the most part co-opted by pretty birthing suites, a sprinkling of female OB GYNs and certified nurse midwives and the epidural, probably the most overused and profitable drug prescribed in hospitals today.

In deference to a culture born of industrial revolution and growing into a techno-crazy, pregnant mothers are ultra-sounded, stress-tested, hooked up via electrodes and doptone. Birthing mothers struggle to understand the data, rather than listen with intuition to their soon-born child. And while no one can criticize the use of cutting edge medical science when a true emergency arises, its use as standard care for every birth diminishes not only the magic and mystery of the birthing process but also disrupts the very biochemical bonds of mother and child, leading the way to a host of potentially negative outcomes.

Birth is power, the very power of life. Women experiencing birth on their own terms become empowered. A culture that takes away power from women giving birth disempowers all women, whether they choose motherhood or not.

### **Miscarriage/Stillbirth**

- *Silent Sorrow: Pregnancy Loss* by Perry-Lynn Moffit

### **PostPartum Depression**

- *This Isn't What I Expected : Recognizing and Recovering from Depression and Anxiety After Childbirth*, Karen R. Kleiman, Valerie D. Raskin

### **Pregnancy & Birth**

- *A Good Birth, A Safe Birth*, Diana Korte
- *Natural Childbirth The Bradley®Way*, Susan Mc Cutcheon, AAHCC
- *Pregnancy, Childbirth, and the Newborn: The Complete Guide*, Penny Simkin, Janet Whalley & Ann Keppler
- *The Thinking Woman's Guide to a Better Birth*, Henci Goer
- [www.birthingthefuture.org](http://www.birthingthefuture.org).
- [www.childbirth.org](http://www.childbirth.org)

### Nutrition

<http://www.bradleybirth.com/PD.aspx>

# Resources



## Breastfeeding

- *The Womanly Art of Breastfeeding*, distributed by La Leche League International
- [www.lalecheleague.org](http://www.lalecheleague.org)

## Baby Care/Parenting

- *The Baby Book*, Dr. William and Martha Sears, RN, IBCLC
- *Sweet Dreams - A Pediatrician's Secrets*, Dr. Paul Fleiss, M.D
- *The Case for Make Believe: Saving Play in a Commercialized World* by Susan Linn
- *Consuming Kids: Protecting Our Children from the Onslaught of Marketing & Advertising* by Susan Linn (Also a DVD by MEF)

## Exercise

- *Essential Exercises for the Childbearing Years*, Elizabeth Noble

# I

## Before you get pregnant

*I admit it. Only one of my five pregnancies was truly “planned.” But, if you are in the advantageous position of planning your upcoming pregnancy, you can take some ensure your baby’s better health.* For starters, eat healthy foods. If your diet includes a lot of fast food, snack foods, soda pop and sweets, change up by skipping the fries, snacking on nutmeats and veggies, drinking water, milk or soy milk and treating yourself to a tasty, fresh fruit for dessert.

### Begin prenatal vitamins with folic acid.

Folic acid, a nutrient found naturally in leafy green vegetables, has been proven to decrease a baby’s chances of experiencing neural tube defects such as spina bifida (where the spine does not close resulting paralysis) and hydrocephalus (fluid on the brain that can cause brain damage).

Unless you eat a lot of just picked, farm fresh greens, chances are you are not getting enough folic acid. Because this defect occurs in the very first weeks of pregnancy, it’s important to have folic acid in your diet as soon as possible.

### Quit those bad habits.

The baby growing inside of you depends on to provide all it needs to grow. So, it takes its nutrients and oxygen from your blood supply. If you smoke, drink or do drugs, so does your baby—at a concentration that’s affects him ten times as much as it does you. By quitting before you get pregnant, you eliminate the risk that baby will ingest these harmful substances during those early, formative days of gestation. You also will increase your own health and ability to carry your healthy baby to full term.

## I Before you get pregnant

**Caffeine** has been linked miscarriages and low birth weight. Studies conclude pregnant women should not drink more than 300 grams of caffeine a day (3, 8 ounce cups of coffee) but many health educators, myself included, feel it is better to just give it up all together. Keep in mind many varieties of soda pop—Coke, Pepsi, Mellow Yellow, Barq's Rootbeer and Dr. Pepper, to be specific—have caffeine as do some teas and chocolate.

**Myth:** *The Placenta is a barrier that keeps all the bad stuff out.*

**Reality:** *The placenta is like a sieve; whatever mom ingests goes through to baby.*

**Smoking** cigarettes reduces the amount of oxygen available to your baby. Nicotine increases baby's heart rate and can make his lungs more susceptible to breathing problems, including SIDS, asthma and allergies, after birth. Smoking also increases the risk for miscarriage, still birth, premature birth and low birth weight. Second hand smoke can have the same effects. New studies also have linked smoking to colic and more terrible behaviors during those terrible twos.

**Drinking** beer, wine or liquor during pregnancy can cause fetal alcohol syndrome.

These babies may have facial deformities and experience problems eating, sleeping, seeing, hearing and learning. As children, they may not be able to follow directions, pay attention or control their behavior.

### Help!

Do you want more information on Fetal Alcohol Syndrome? Visit [www.nofas.org](http://www.nofas.org).  
Do you need help to stop drinking or doing drugs?  
Contact [www.alcoholicsanonymous.org](http://www.alcoholicsanonymous.org).

If you're in the hospital, you'll all probably be happier if you stay together, that's called rooming in. Do you really think you can rest knowing the baby you've been waiting for these past nine months is away in the nursery? And, remember, he's been used to nothing but your body these past nine months. You and your partner may choose to give him his first gentle sponge bath—newborns are not really dirty. If you see that waxy white stuff on him, rub it in—don't sponge it off. It's a natural protectant called vernix, and it's the best skin moisturizer known to man.

For a more successful breastfeeding experience, insist that he receives no bottles—not even water—and no pacifier. Your milk won't come in till two or three days after the birth. Meanwhile, your breasts provide colostrum which cleans out his bowels and vaccinates him by sharing all your antibodies with him. Keep eating your high protein diet—plus extra water—so you can make enough milk.

Does he look a little yellow the second or third day? He may be jaundiced. A little sunlight and a lot of breast milk might do the trick. In hospital, they might put him under “Bili” lights.

When she cries, know that she has a reason. She is not a little control freak trying to see how high you'll jump. She may be hungry, tired, scared, lonely, need a diaper change or have a tummy ache (a “l-a-a-a” cry usually means hungry, a guttural cry, tummy trouble.) You can't give a newborn too much love, attention, hugs or cuddles.

What will she need for the next few months? Breast milk, a clean bottom, comfortable clothing, a safe place to sleep, a safe car seat to ride in—and don't forget to include her in your conversations.

## 7 Those First Magical Moments

Well, here he is. Warm, a little slimy, a puffy little face with what seems an oversized mouth. Maybe he's crying or maybe he's just looking around. If he hasn't been drugged, he's probably pretty alert—and looking for something to suck.

Nestle him to your breast. As he gets the hang of latching on and suckling, you'll feel your uterus contract and begin to expel the placenta. In fact, during the first week, every time he nurses, your uterus will contract so, before you now it, it's back to normal. That's because when a baby nurses, mother's body secretes the hormone oxytocin which not only stimulates her uterus but also makes her feel happy and calm.

At first, she'll only be able to focus on objects six to eight inches away. Her favorite shape? A circle of course—like mom's nipple. The palms of her hand are the most sensitive and she'll love touching your skin—yours, too, dad.

Your medical team will want to keep her warm. That might mean a stocking cap or a warmer brought over mom and baby as they cuddle and nurse. You might decide to wait till the cord stops pulsing before it's cut—then she'll have received all the blood she needs. Perhaps Dad will want to cut the cord and accept responsibility for his child.

**Street drugs** cause all kinds of long lasting physical and mental problems for babies, including addiction. Even marijuana can cause pregnancy complications including miscarriage, difficult labor and delivery and increased chances of your child developing cancer and learning disabilities.

### **Examine your relationship with your partner.**

While having a baby is probably the most wonderful experience a couple can share, it also adds a lot of stress to a relationship. Before you take this giant step of creating a child together, make sure you are doing so for the right reasons. While I've been single through most of my parenting years and have done pretty well, I have to admit that a child has a lot easier time if she has two parents she can rely on. Both parents are a fundamental part of her beingness no matter how independent the one raising her feels.

- **A baby won't make your relationship better.** If you're having problems, talk, listen, work it out or seek counseling—but don't expect a baby to heal the rifts. In fact, expect the extra stress and responsibilities to make living together even more difficult.
- **A baby is not a good way to keep your partner around.** If your partner is being unfaithful, unable to commit or otherwise aloof, a pregnancy might drive him—or her—away sooner and further. On the other hand, a new baby might just prolong a doomed relationship for another few painful years and keep you from getting on with the true life of your dreams. And, you will have brought a child into the midst of a painful experience.

## I Before you get pregnant

**A baby will be there for the rest of your life.** When life gets painful, opting for the quick fix can be tempting. While pregnancy may work as a quick fix, a child is not. Your baby will become your child, then your teenager and then an adult. He will be imbued with all your wonderful insights, talents and love. But he may also be held back by the negatives you allow into your life. Do yourself, your partner and your child the wonderful favor of bringing him into a loving, supportive environment that will help him grow into a happy, positive adult. *Now, let's add some ying to that yang.*



### **Celebrate!**

You just got the good news. You are going to have a baby. Celebrate your life, your experiences, your good qualities and talents and how you will share them with your growing child. Celebrate love and the miraculous gifts it gives us. Celebrate your child. She will be, above all, herself. Know that you will do your best to help her become all that she can be. Starting now...

### **Be a positive presence.**

If a positive, natural birth is your goal, you can help make it happen by having a positive attitude—and radiating that attitude to those who attend you during your birth. Your partner's encouraging words will also have a great effect. Ask your partner to tell your nurse or doctor how well you are doing whenever they enter the room.

Most people working who have made obstetrics or midwifery their career are dedicated to helping mothers throughout labor and delivery. If you let them know that you are doing well, that you are handling the contractions, that you have the mental stamina to handle a long labor, they will be less likely to prescribe drugs and interventions to help you.

Your partner or support person's touch can also do a lot to calm you and keep you focused. Massaging your feet, back and hands or simply brushing your hair will help you through. Until you get to the transitional phase of labor--then, you may not want anyone to touch you at all.

### **Kangaroos have the right idea.**

In many preemie nurseries, nurses “kangaroo”, that is, they carry the babies around in specially designed carriers. Why? Because research has shown that babies thrive when they experience touch. So, before you relegate your baby to the automatic swing or convenient plastic carrier, think about how much more cuddle time she'll get if you rock her to sleep yourself or remove her from the car seat and carry her on your hip. Yes, you might lose a little time today. But you will be helping her to be a happier, more well balanced child tomorrow.

## 6 Birth as your body intended

After baby is born, you face a whole new set of options. Who cuts the cord? When is it cut? Do you allow your baby to be vaccinated with Vitamin K and Hepatitis B immediately? Do you want antibiotics put in his eyes? You have the right to be informed of and involved in all these choices. Make your wishes known on your birth plan.

When you've completed your birth plan, share it with your doctor or midwife. Share it with any other doctors who may be on call for your birth. Share it with the head of the ObGyn unit at your hospital—ask them to keep it on file. And, keep a copy with you during labor so you can remind your healthcare team of your wishes. Don't forget the old saying, you catch more flies with honey than vinegar. Your healthcare team is there to help. Most likely, they are dedicated professionals who take pride in providing the best care they can to mothers and babies. Respect their knowledge and opinions—and stand up for what's important to you.



## 2

### Nutrition: Baby is what you eat.

You've heard the words "eating for two" --probably as a joke or to tease a pregnant woman who has a lot of food on her plate. The truth is, when you are pregnant you are eating for two. The foods you choose are what will nourish—or malnourish—your unborn child. Some people still believe the misconception that a baby is like a parasite who can suck what he needs from his mother's body. The number of low weight, full term babies being born in the United States proves this nonsense wrong.

Like their mothers, babies thrive on a well balanced diet that includes fresh fruits and vegetables, milk and dairy products, breads and grains and lean meats and fish—with some special considerations.

**Myth:** *Baby will take what he needs from his mother's body.*

**Reality:** *Baby will share the nutrients his mother eats.*

#### **Protein.**

Protein may well be the most important building block for your baby's health. In the first trimester (first three months of your pregnancy) protein will not only provide substance for your baby's growth but it will help you to decrease nausea. In the second trimester (months four, five and six), baby continues to rely on the protein in your diet so she can grow—as do your stretching uterus and abdominal skin. Protein builds baby's brain.

**Myth** *If the mother eats her vitamins and lots of fruits and vegetables, baby will have all that she needs.* **Reality:** *Protein is the most important building block to baby's*

## 2

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#### How Much Protein?

**To build a better baby, include 80 to 100 grams of protein in your diet every day.** Yes, that can be a challenge!

1. Snack often—even when you get up to go to the bathroom in the middle of the night.
2. Choose well. Don't fill up on foods that don't build your baby.
3. Keep track with the daily diet journal you can print out at the back of this book.

**Eggs**, 1, 6 grams

**Lean Meat, Fish and Poultry**, 3 ½ ounces.  
25-30 grams

**Tofu**, 8 oz. 20 grams

**Peanut Butter**, ????

**Beans** (legumes-- kidney or pinto)  
1 cup, 17 grams

**Nuts and Seeds**, 1 tablespoon, 2-3 grams

**Milk, Soy Milk**, 8 oz. 8 grams

**Yogurt**, 8 oz., 8 grams

**Cream Cheese**, 1 oz. 2 grams.

**Cheese**, 1 oz., 7 to 10 grams

**Cottage Cheese**, 8 oz., 28 grams.

**Whole Wheat Bread**, 1 slice, 10 grams

**White Bread**, 1 slice, 2 grams

**White Rice**, cooked, 1 cup, 5 grams

**Brown Rice**, cooked,

**Oatmeal**, cooked, 1 cup, 5 grams

**Whole Grain Cold Cereal**, 1 cup ???

**"White" Grain Cold Cereal**,

**Wheat Germ**, toasted, ¼ Cup, 8 grams.

**Nutritional Yeast** flakes, tablespoon, 4 grams

**Potato**, baked with skin, medium, 5 grams

**Most Fruits**, each, 1 gram

**Most Vegetables**, ½ cup, 1-3 grams

When it comes time to push baby out, be aware that some medical teams have a clock running and want that baby out within the hour. If all is well, you might want to insist that nature simply take her course. The alternatives might be an early episiotomy—your bottom is cut before it has natural thinned out resulting in more layers of stitches, a more difficult recovery and more chance of permanent damage. Forceps or vacuum extraction might be used to pull baby out. Both have their risks.

Changing to a squatting position opens the pelvis by an extra 10% and may be the better choice. Hot compresses and perineal massage may work better than a late episiotomy. An episiotomy can actually increase, rather than decrease, your chances of tearing.

#### A thought on drugs and birth...

Would you rather handle a few hours of pain (during labor) or deal with a week of stitches? When you birth without drugs, you have less chance of C-section and more chance of delivering without episiotomy.

## 6 Birth as your body intended

If you choose a hospital birth, all sorts of interventions may be offered—or required. To start with, you may be hooked up to an external or internal monitor. Next, you may be subjected to routine, hourly internal exams—and since dilation can stall for hours and then complete in minutes, these routine exams don't always serve a whole lot of purpose. If you are in a teaching hospital, your vagina and cervix may become the class Guinea pigs for teaching anything from how to do measure cervical dilation to how to administer pain relief. You may wish to request that only your assigned caregiver perform these tasks.

You will also want to think about whether you want to accept pain relief medication or handle your contractions with relaxation, deep breathing and change of positions. Back labor is often relieved by changing to an hands and knees position that allows baby's head to drop down away from the spine. Lying on your side with pillows under or between your knees may be more comfortable than semi-sitting. Walking around, showering or squatting may shorten the time your labor takes. If your birth place has a hot tub, just relaxing there can make labor more bearable.

### More birth plan advice...

For help with composing your birth plan, visit [www.childbirth.org](http://www.childbirth.org). This website has a birth plan that you can create online and then print out—as well as tons of helpful information

Calcium also helps your muscles to function at full capacity. The uterus is the biggest muscle in the human body, male or female. By maintaining good calcium levels throughout your pregnancy you will help your uterus to be healthy and strong enough to push your baby out and recover after his birth

Of course, baby needs all those wonderful vitamins and minerals that help keep our bodies healthy. Because many of our foods today are processed or picked green, every pregnant woman should include prenatal vitamins as part of her daily diet.

*Myth : Mothers should only gain a prescribed number of pounds during pregnancy.*

*Reality: Mothers eating a well balanced diet including 80 to 100 grams of protein will gain very different amounts of weight and have healthier babies.*

### Salt

When farm animals become pregnant, they put out salt licks for their expectant mothers. Salt is a needed nutrient during pregnancy, so, salt your food to taste. Keep in mind that if your diet includes a lot of packaged, canned or fast foods, you may be getting more salt than you need. Read your labels!

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*Reality: Mothers eating a well balanced diet including 80 to 100 grams of protein will gain very different amounts of weight and have healthier babies.*

### 3

## Very Basic Prenatal Exercises

Birth is a physical event. If you are fit and flexible, giving birth will be that much easier for you. If you are already physically active and exercising regularly, keep at it—with just a few modifications after your third or fourth month.

- Do not lay on your back. The weight of your growing baby will slow down your circulation, reduce oxygen flow to your baby and press on your kidneys. The same goes for your sleeping position.
- Avoid abdominal exercises, such as sit-ups or leg lifts. You may separate your abdominal muscles and have a real hard time getting them to knit back together for a flat post partum tummy.
- Save jogging or jumping for later. The stress of baby's weight may stretch or damage your perineal floor muscles (resulting in sneezy peezies—incontinence and other problems during birth and beyond).

All moms-to-be can benefit from the following simple exercises during pregnancy. Try to practice them every day. Maybe your partner will join you.

*A Little Global Perspective. My birth instructor worked on the Island of Fiji during a stint in the Peace Corps. She said that mothers there teach their young daughters, from age 3 or 4, to do their Kegel exercises.*

### Write your birth plan.

Whether you choose to give birth at home or at your regions most high-tech hospital, writing your own birth plan will help you to communicate your birth goals to your healthcare team. Of course, the first goal is a healthy baby and healthy mom. Make sure your healthcare team understands that you will be flexible if emergency or unforeseen circumstances arise. That will put them at ease and help them to be able to accept the other goals that your birth plan discusses.

The first items on your birth plan may encompass your prenatal care. For example, you may wish to skip internal exams in the last trimester—they can introduce germs and in some cases, break the bag of waters. You might also opt to do without routine testing—ultrasound, blood sugar, non-stress testing—if you are not experiencing any symptoms that might indicate problems. And, you may choose to refuse induction of labor when you pass your due date as long as both you and baby are showing signs of good health. After all, no two humans are exactly alike—and no two babies need the exact same amount of time to be ready for birth.

You'll also want to decide what type of atmosphere you want during labor and delivery. Some mothers enjoy having many friends and family members present throughout. Others may prefer just having their partner or one close friend present. Having at least one support person present with you throughout your entire labor definitely takes the edge off-and has been proven to make labor easier. Don't depend on a hospital staff or your doctor or midwife to be that person. They may be busy handling other births as well.

In fact, by involving your partner or support person to help you write your birth plan, you give them tools to support you in your labor and delivery goals. During labor, when you are too tired or too distracted to make your point, your partner or support person can remind your healthcare team of your birth plan's specifics.

## 6 Birth as your body intended

### **Make healthy choices during pregnancy.**

If you do decide you want a truly natural birth, the first step is to do everything you can to maintain your own health and fitness while you build that better baby. That means avoiding unhealthy substances and circumstances, eating well, exercising, learning to relax and let go of stress and surrounding yourself with supportive people.

### **Choose a supportive healthcare team.**

Choosing a doctor or midwife who supports natural birth is also important—but often difficult to find. The next best thing is finding a medical team that you makes you feel comfortable, that respects you and that supports your choices as long as they do not interfere with your health or your baby's well being. Your childbirth educator may be able to suggest a doctor or midwife that supports natural birth.

Keep in mind, that if you choose a hospital birth, your doctor may not be the one taking care of you for most of your labor. You will be expected to conform to the hospital's policies—even if your doctor agreed to something different. Because my last child was born when I was 40 years old, I chose a home birth with an experienced lay midwife. I knew that in spite of my good health and healthy pregnancy, I would be considered high-risk in the local hospital setting and all sorts of intervention would be required.

For additional support, you might consider hiring a doula, an experienced birth coach who can guide you through your labor.

Whether you work out regularly or not, incorporate these four exercises into your daily routine.

1. **Tailor Sit Whenever You Can.** Though not exactly an exercise, sitting tailor style—on the floor, cross-legged—stretches your inner thighs, lets air flow to your perineum and promotes good leg circulation. You can tailor sit on the sofa, in a chair or on the floor. It's so much better for your body than normal chair sitting,



Speaking of air flow, if you are the least bit susceptible to yeast infections, wear white cotton panties (sorry, not thongs), loose pants or a skirt and stay away from panty hose.

2. **100 Kegels.** Named for the doctor who documented its importance, the Kegel exercise involves tightening and loosening your perineum (your bottom around your anus and vagina). The growing weight of your baby and the act of birth itself put tremendous pressure on the pelvic floor muscles. When these muscles are stretched too much and are damaged, you can develop lifelong problems that range from sneezie-pee-zies (incontinence) to prolapsed uterus. Building up your pelvic floor muscles will enable your pelvic floor muscles to stretch during birth (and help avoid episiotomy) and contract after birth.

To get a feel for which muscles we're talking about, try this. Next time you have to pee, contract your bottom to make the flow of urine stop. Then release. Exercising these muscles, say ten times, each time you go to the bathroom can be a good way to remember to do them. However, release most of your urine first so that the contraction does not send some back up to the bladder and introduce infection.

### 3 Very Basic Prenatal Exercises

**3. Squatting** helps you develop stretch and strength for giving birth. In fact, for many women, the squatting position works better than any other for giving birth. You see, squatting juxtaposes the pelvic bones in such a way that the size of your birth canal is increased by a full ten percent.

If squatting is a new adventure, begin by holding onto a chair, or your partner, for balance. Or, place your hands on the tops of thighs a few inches above the knees to keep from wobbling. Step your feet apart to a wide stance—align your heels with outer shoulders. Point your feet out to about a 45-degree angle. Keep your feet flat, heels down. Then, slowly drop your bottom between your legs. On the way up, you may need to rely on that chair, that partner or your hands pushing up on your thighs.

In addition to doing at least ten squats a day, squat whenever you have to pick up something off the floor. As your ability to squat improves, remain in the squatting position for up to a 90 seconds. That is how long a second stage contraction may last. Practice some deep abdominal breaths in the squatting position. You'll find you have a little more room to really inhale.



**The Bottom Line...** *In countries where people squat when they go to the bathroom, they have an easier time giving birth and less incidence of hemorrhoids.*

## 6

### Birth as your body intended

Believe it or not, women were giving birth, naturally, long before medical science came on the scene. While I am totally thankful for the medical advances that have helped me and my family to maintain optimal health, I am also in awe of the natural birth process. In the absence of medical problems, a natural birth is easier for mom and healthier for baby.

After all, why does the same medical establishment that warns pregnant women against using drugs—even an aspirin—deem it safe to expose her and her unborn baby to a whole host of powerful drugs during birth?

Well, for one, medicine has its roots in treating illness. However, pregnancy and birth are not an illness. Two, perhaps the medical staff feels they are prepared to handle any problems that arise from the drugs and procedures they decide to use during birth. For example, if a drugged baby shows signs of distress during labor, the monitors will report it and a C-section can save the baby.

While drugs and interventions do have their place in certain circumstances, I believe they can do more harm than good in a normal, healthy labor and delivery. Of course, you have to form your own opinion and make your own choices.

## 5 Just Relax

Having your partner relax with you can be a big plus. After all, he is probably experiencing some stress due to pregnancy as well as all the day-to-day stresses that we all experience. If he wants to help you relax, he can touch or gently massage each body part in succession as you go through the exercise. Or, he can verbally guide you through the process. If he does this for you, try to do the same for him sometimes. A partner this devoted deserves some special treatment.

Experiencing the relaxation exercises together can be a great way to unwind and spend some down time together. Touching and massaging can also be nice foreplay during pregnancy. Unless your doctor has told you of a specific medical reason why you shouldn't, making love during pregnancy is usually safe.

During the first trimester, mom may not be in the mood if she is experiencing a great deal of nausea and fatigue, but by the second trimester, her appetite often increases to a new high. The weight of the growing baby on her pelvic floor can actually stimulate her sexually, all kinds of helpful hormones are flying around and she doesn't need to worry about contraception.

In the third trimester, mom's growing tummy may make it difficult to get in a comfortable position—so experiment. Many women become very fatigued the last few months—it's a lot of working building a baby. So, they might just as soon go to sleep. The key is keeping those communication lines open and finding other ways to express your love to one another. Good practice! Once that baby is here, long nights of uninterrupted love may remain a pleasant memory (unless your wise and plan ahead for an occasional sitter).

## Pelvic Rocks

Pelvic rocks accomplish several objectives for your pregnant body. They strengthen your abdominal muscles, relieve stress from your lower back area and help you hold your uterus higher. When you hold your uterus higher, you will have less pressure on your bladder, pelvic floor muscles and low back. That means, more comfort and less chance of damage to these areas of your body.

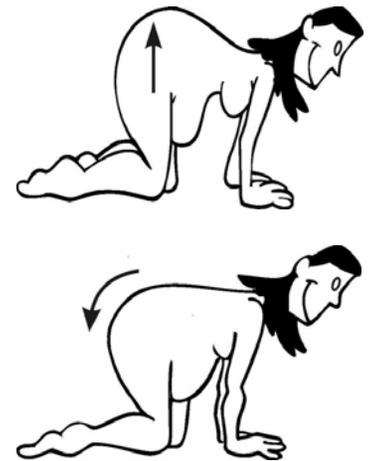
Pelvic rocks can also relieve gas! I passed this trick on to my children when they were young. "Mama, I have a tummy ache!" "Do your kitty cat exercises."

My kids called hands-and-knees pelvic rocks "kitty cat exercises" because you rather mimic the motion of a cat arching its back. Add the movement of tucking your pelvis under (think of bringing your tail bone towards your chin). Then relax back out (but not into a slouch). I used to tell my students having trouble with this

exercise to think of the pelvic action that got them into this state to begin with.

You can also do pelvic rocks in a standing position—though you will be working against gravity and not realize the uterus-lifting benefits.

Because pelvic rocks can be so good for you, try doing 20 every morning, afternoon and early evening plus 40 just before you get into bed.



### 3 Very Basic Prenatal Exercises

A **brisk walk**, one of the best and easiest exercises during pregnancy, gets your heart going, strengthens your legs and can be done just about anywhere. If you're not physically active, try to work up to walking about one mile each day—that's about six average city blocks--at as brisk of pace as you can without becoming too winded. Take the dog, take a friend, take a co-worker—whatever it takes to get you out there.

**Swimming**, another excellent pregnancy body-builder, offers aerobic benefits while putting even more muscles to work. The best part is, even when you're nine months along, you'll float. It feels wonderful to get that weight off !

**Prenatal Yoga** classes will help you with strength and flexibility as well as breathing and relaxation. (One caveat—avoid inverted poses.) Yoga can also help you keep in touch with spiritual awakenings that are a very special aspect of pregnancy.

**Tai Chi** is another gentle way to stretch, strengthen and improve your concentration.

### Toes-up tension relaxation.

Starting with your toes, consciously tense then relax each individual body part-- feet, calves, thighs, buttocks, abdomen, shoulders, upper arms, lower arms, hands, neck, jaw and face.

### The Warm, White Light

Starting at the center of your forehead, imagine a warm, white, beam of light focused on your forehead. Visualize the light moving down over your eyes, jaw, full face, head, neck, shoulders, arms (right then left), chest, abdomen, buttocks, thighs (right then left), calves (right then left), feet (right then left). As you

imagine the light warming each body part, think of it as warming that part of you, making that part of you feel heavy and sleepy and then totally relaxed. For example, “The warm, white light is bathing my shoulders. My shoulders feel heavy, sleepy. My shoulders feel totally relaxed.”

### Speaking of partners...

Did you know that psychologically dads are about three months behind moms in their experience of pregnancy? And, while you're wound up in the marvel of your expanding body and growing baby, he may be thinking more about his increasing responsibilities to the relationship, especially financial ones.

# 5

## Just Relax

Relaxation techniques do more than keep the stress off during pregnancy. They are vital to handling your labor and birth, especially if you want to avoid drugs and other interventions.

- If you can relax mentally, fear will not throw your body into fight-or-flight mode. This causes the release of adrenalin which can slow or stop labor. (That's labor "stops" for many moms on the way to the hospital—they are scared or excited. Either emotion can release adrenalin.)
- By learning how to relax all your other muscle groups, you will conserve more energy for that most important muscle, the uterus. Tension burns energy!
- If you are relaxed, you will be better able to visualize your body working to birth your baby so you can tune into the process and work with it.
- If you can consciously relax your pelvic floor muscles, you may have less chance of episiotomy or tearing.

Following are two basic relaxation techniques. Your childbirth instructor can share others. Or, you may want to purchase an audio relaxation recording for relaxation practice. To set the scene for relaxation, darken the room, play some relaxing music (Steven Halpern has some wonderful tunes), take the phone off the hook and get comfortable in a semi-sitting or side-lying position.

# 4 Simple Breathing

If you've ever seen a sitcom or movie where the female lead gives birth, you've no doubt seen her do that "funny" breathing—the "he-he-who" and "ha-ha-ha" finally punctuated with a breath held so hard that the face nearly explodes. These breathing techniques, coupled with some visual focal point, are, for the most part, designed to help the mother distract herself from the labor so that her body can accomplish its goal. In my attempts to do this with my first two babies, I had lost it by the time I was dilated to three and ended up accepting every drug offered to me.

You see, unless you're one of those extremely self-controlled types, distracting yourself from your labor is pretty impossible. It's a little hard to ignore the biggest muscle in your body working harder than it ever has especially when it's pushing your baby's bone-hard head through a place that you never even wanted to think about stretching that wide before. That's why, when I was pregnant with my third son, I was thrilled to discover that the only breathing I needed to practice was deep abdominal breathing.

*Deep abdominal breathing is helpful during pregnancy and labor because it relaxes the muscles, it is soothing to the nervous system and the brain; very much the breath creates a connection between the body and the emotions. Regulating or measuring the breath help release contraction pain during labor and is a wonderful tool for focusing the mind.*

## 4 Simple Breathing

### Deep Abdominal Breathing

Close your eyes. See your baby in your mind's eye. Imagine that the amniotic sack holding your baby is a large balloon. As you inhale deeply through your nose, imagine filling that balloon, from the bottom up. Inhale until the balloon is completely full then slowly exhale through your mouth.

Practice your deep abdominal breathing for 90-second intervals several times each day. (That's about how long a contraction might last). A nice way to practice with your partner is to sit on the floor

between his knees. Let him put his arms around you, under your arms, and place his hands on baby. Then give his hands a nice gentle ride, up and down, as you breathe in and out.

You can also practice your deep abdominal breathing any time you feel stressed. This will help relieve the stress and prepare you to handle the stress of labor contractions with your breathing.

### First Stage Labor Breathing

During labor, you might need to breathe totally through your mouth as you may find your body, as it makes the birth canal slippery with mucous, has also plugged up your nose. Begin your deep abdominal breathing with the start of each contraction. Instead of trying to distract yourself from the contraction, tune into it, relax around it and work with it. With eyes closed, visualize the breath surrounding the baby. Visualize your uterus contracting from the top, opening at the bottom and the baby slipping down, through and out.

Your partner can recite this visualization to you if that helps during your contractions. His hand on your abdomen can also serve as a guide for your breathing—as long as you're up to being touched.

Deep abdominal breathing will carry you through your entire labor until it is time to actively push the baby out. It will also help you handle after-birth pains, which can be quite strong especially when you're nursing your baby.

### Second Stage Labor Breathing

During the pushing phase, you will take three deep breaths when the contraction starts and then hold the third, using the inhaled air as a wedge to help push the baby out. When you need another breath, take a quick, deep gulp of air and hold it again. Repeat this, two or three times, till the contraction is done. Never hold your breath longer than is comfortable. Both you and baby need a continuous supply of oxygen!

*Times Up!* If you've had a long, intense labor, your body may require a rest as the pushing stage begins. As long as you and baby are doing well, enjoy the rest stage—you have some very hard work ahead of you.