

Birth Preparation

Getting through labor is really a matter of digging into your inner strength and figuring it out as you go along. You will discover how to do it! Birth is instinctive and involuntary. Your body will drive the process. Unique strengths and experiences mean that different women birth in different ways. Being deeply connected to your reasons for wanting to labor with or without pain medications or other interventions is really where your determination will come from. Clarifying this may be your most important work. You may also draw deeply from inner strength, love, and outside supports. This worksheet will help you identify tools that might work for you during any challenging parts of labor, and will also help you think through how to best support your body with rest, hydration, and food.

Insights Into Myself

Who am I? How do I approach challenges when I'm at my best?

What are some of my strengths in life - what do people say I am good at? What are my natural character strengths? How can I apply those to birth or to preparing for birth?

When working through labor, am I more likely to display trust, faith, and acceptance or am I more likely to display will and determination, endurance and drive? Perhaps both?

Do I tap into the love and provision that is there for me? Do I find this best in people or in my beliefs?

What strengthens my spirit or inner resolve?

When I feel stressed I can remain calm by:

To cope with pain I prefer to:

- Be alone or to be with people •
- Keep myself busy or tune into myself •
- Distract my thoughts or explore my thoughts •
- Be quiet or talk with someone •
- Be touched or not to be touched •
- Have someone help or work it out alone •

What type of environment will help me most?

What will be most helpful during early labor? How will I remain calm? How will I center myself?

How will I rest if needed?

What will I eat and drink? If I feel nauseous but can keep fluids and light foods down, how will I force myself to drink and maybe eat?

How will I distract or entertain myself in early labor if I don't need to rest?

What will be most helpful once labor is intense?

What can I imagine might help me with work through contractions?

What will I be feeling, thinking, and doing in labor? What will I look and sound like?

What helps me trust in birth and believe that it is working?

What helps me trust that I will make it?

Review this list of techniques for working with labor. Mark those you feel may be a fit for you and any that you would like to learn more about or practice. You do not need to use them all! Reach out for help if you would like to learn more about any of these techniques.

- Open to and accept each contraction through an initial cleansing breath or a constructive mantra.
- Become the path of least resistance and allow contractions to flow through your body by:
 - Remaining fluid and moving rhythmically,
 - Allowing your body to be limp while breathing calmly,
 - Allowing loud sounds to emerge and carry you.
- Aid the physical opening of your body by keeping your hands, eyes, neck/throat, and mouth open and your sounds low or breathy.
- Become expansive and allow yourself to become one with the power of contractions.
- Call on God or helpers or your inner strength for help.
- Visualize images of calm or love or strength.
- Visualize images of opening.
- Repeat positive affirmations or mantras to yourself or aloud.
- Follow the voice of someone else through a guided relaxation or visualization script. Allow it to lead you into deep relaxation or distraction.
- Get into a tub of water or the shower.
- Relax into heat or cool comfort or loving touches.
- Go into the pain and explore the sensation. Where is the center of the pain? Can you release the pain from that spot? Where are the edges of the pain. Can you feather them away?
- Bring your attention to your breath and breathe slowly through a contraction.
- Count your way through your contractions.
- Pick an external focal point - something to look at or a sound to concentrate on - and distract yourself from your labor by focusing externally.
- Distract yourself through non-focused awareness of all of the sounds or sights in a room. Allow your mind or your ear to wander and take note of all they can notice throughout a contraction.
- Tone: find a note that resonates in your body and "sing" it throughout contractions.
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Visioning my Birth

I can imagine myself laboring in the following ways:

Positive thinking and focusing on our strengths create a constructive mindset for birth. With doubt and disbelief, labor can become overwhelming. While thoughts and feelings can seem involuntary, we have a measure of control over what thoughts we focus on and what thoughts we allow to pass by. Consider the following options and their impact on your confidence, resourcefulness, and resilience during labor. Share a few with your birth partner that you feel will be helpful to you.

Feelings

- | | | | | |
|------------|-------------|----------------|--------------------|---|
| • Fear | • Open | • Curious | • Awe | • |
| • Anxiety | • Receptive | • Perseverance | • Thrilling | • |
| • Panic | • Willing | • Powerful | • Transformational | • |
| • Bracing | • Okay | • Big | • Trust | • |
| • Fighting | • Patient | • Expansive | • Confidence | • |

Thoughts

- | | | | |
|--|----------------------|---|-------------------|
| • I can do this. | • I'm healthy. | • Let it build. | • Let my mind go. |
| • I can trust this. | • I'm strong. | • Go along. | • Wow. |
| • My only job is to be willing. | • This is temporary. | • Count my way through. | • |
| • Calmer is easier. | • This is working. | • Focus. | • |
| • This pain will not be the end of me. | • Okay, here we go. | • Let go. | • |
| | • I'm ready. | • What an incredible thing to be part of. | • |
| | • Go with it. | | • |

Actions

- | | | | |
|---------------------|---|--|--------------------------------|
| • Rocking | • Praying | • Meditation | • Focus on a picture or sound. |
| • Nodding | • Going limp (intentional relaxation of every part of your body, or of your skin everywhere from head to toe) | • Mantras / affirmations | • |
| • Vocalizing | • Slow deep breathing | • Taking comfort in a lap, hug, massage, heat, cold, or smells | • |
| • Looking up | • Visualization | • Taking comfort in reassurance and encouragement | • |
| • Looking down | | | • |
| • Floating in water | | | • |
| • Showering | | | • |

Images

- Opening circles
- Spirals
- Opening flowers
- Beautiful places
- Floating
- Water
- Rivers
- Waves
- Colors pouring over, around, & through me
- Animals
- Favorite places that evoke helpful feelings
- Images of strength
- Images of love

Insights into my spouse or birth partner's role and how they can best help me

How does my partner best support me? How do they become a source of comfort or strength?

What types of words would be encouraging for me?

What comfort measures am I drawn to? (See the list on Preparation for Birth Partners.)

How do I imagine their experience during my labor to affect our relationship?

In what ways might labor impact my spouse or birth partner's relationship with the baby and their parenting or the help they can offer myself and my baby postpartum?

If my pain is managed through medications, what type of environment, presence, and support do I want through labor? How do I imagine connecting to the baby or the birth process, and what am I asking of my spouse/partner and other support people?

Thoughts / Insights