

A QUICK GUIDE FOR THE BIRTH PARTNER

Physical Comfort Measures

The Power of touch

- Placing your hand on a shoulder or leg communicate your loving presence.
- Hold her hand.
- Give her a foot or hand massage using her favorite body lotion
- Use touch relaxation techniques- signaling and stroking the tension away from her body.
- Take her face within your hands, if she's having trouble focusing.
- Give her a hug or just hold her in your arms.
- Tap her breathing rhythm on her leg or arm to help her stay on track.
- Respect her desires regarding touch; they may change.
- Encourage light nourishment if she desires something to eat.
- Prevent a dry mouth: offer sips of fluid, ice chips, a wet wash cloth, toothbrush, mouth wash, lip gloss.
- Remind her to urinate every hour or so.
- Encourage walking and moving around as long as she is comfortable. Have her lean on your chest or over a chair while she sways her pelvis in a rhythmical fashion.
- If she has to stay in bed, help her change her position regularly (every 30 minutes). If confined to bed, but unmediated, she may be able to move back and forth from the bed to a bedside chair while maintaining constant fetal monitoring.
- Sitting on a hard surface may feel good. You might suggest a hard chair or the toilet seat.
- Birth balls (physical therapy ball) are becoming more available in the birth setting. You can assist her to sit on the ball while rotating her pelvis, in a smooth, rhythmic motion. She might also want to lean over the ball from a standing or kneeling position.

Breathing help

Support the controlled breathing patterns you learned in childbirth classes.

The key points in most breathing techniques are:

- Keep the breathing as slow as possible for as long as possible to conserve energy and enhance relaxation.
- Concentrate and focus
- Exhale tension with every out breath
- Change the patten and level of breathing to meet the changing demands of labor.

Heat or cold might help

- A trip to the shower or immersion in the tub may be just what she needs.
- A warm compress placed under her abdomen, around her shoulder or on her back may provide comfort. A sock filled with rice can be heated in the microwave for a few minutes and applied to the same areas. Do not apply to the skin or make too hot.
- A warm blanket may help relax her whole body.
- Offer socks for her feet.
- A cold pack made of ice in a plastic bag or surgical glove provides pain relief when applied to a backache. Do not place directly on the skin.
- You can cool her down with a cold, wet washcloth placed on her forehead, neck, or body, as well as fanning her with a hand-held fan or piece of stiff paper.

Relaxation techniques are effective.

- Look for muscle tension, point it out to her, and help her release through your words and touch.

Be clear and specific in your directions, such as:

- "Let your jaw hang loose and open."
- "Release the tension in your forehead."
- "Let go right here in my hand." (As you touch)
- "Relax your shoulders, let them fall heavy."

Visualization

Some women find visualization helpful. Short phrases can often paint a picture.

- "Stay on top of the wave...ride it out."
- "Let it go, just blow it away." (Contraction)
- "With every exhale, release all the negative energy and tension from within."
- "Imagine the cervix opening little by little like a turtleneck sweater."
- "Move the baby down...down and out."

Back labor techniques

- Assist her into a position that "gets the baby off her back." Have her sit while leaning over the back of the bed, hands and knees, or side-lying.
- Encourage pelvic rocking or do the passive pelvic rock to her.
- Try counter pressure to her lower back, using your hands, tennis or racquet balls, a frozen soft drink or rolling pin.
- Apply cold or heat (whichever feels better to her).
- Try techniques like the pelvic hip squeeze, the lunge, the knee press and the dangle.

Help her avoid a panicky situation

- Watch for signs of potential panic: darting or wide open eyes; grasping on; loud voice; holding her breath; extreme restlessness; crying out.
- Remember that she may quite normally feel a bit panicky during the end of the dilation stage of labor (transition). Panic at other times should be examined further.
- Assist her by:
 - Being close, even eye-to-eye if necessary.
 - Speaking clearly and firmly
 - Breathing with her.
 - Holding her face or shoulder in your hands.
 - Staying calm yourself.
 - Asking for help if you need it.

During Pushing

- Help her take a position that is advantageous to pushing: semi-sitting, kneeling, squatting. Upright positions are gravity-enhanced.
- Remind her to "relax" her perineum to allow it to open to the baby's head.
- Support her efforts to push spontaneously with her urges to push.
- Do not discourage her from making low-pitched moaning or groaning noises or grunts.
- Be patient- a slower, controlled effort will help her to give birth without tearing or needing an episiotomy.

*Your journey into childbirth is one that can reap countless rewards for you and your partner. Knowing how you can help will greatly increase your confidence, your sensitivity and your pleasure. As an active part of the labor team, you will feel empowered to "make a difference" in how your partner will cope with and remember this very special day in her life.

For more in-depth information on labor support, the following books are recommended:

- *Mothering the Mother*, by Marshall and Phyllis Klaus and John Kennell
- *The Nurturing Touch at Birth*, by Paulina Perez
- *The Birth Partner*, by Penny Simkin