

# Comfort Measures

## Goal

To increase participants' awareness of comfort measures that support the woman in labour.

## Objectives

By the end of the module, participants will be able to describe:

- The causes of pain in labour.
- How comfort measures affect pain perception.
- The role of the labour support team.
- At least five types of comfort techniques.
- Strategies for managing back labour.
- Self-help strategies for the woman in labour.
- Various breathing techniques.
- Where to find more information.
- Their personal list of comfort measure strategies.

## Comfort Measures Outline (45-60 minutes)

1. Introductions and housekeeping
2. Scenario: Anna and Domenic
3. Gate control theory
4. Labour support
5. Comfort measures
6. Back labour
7. Breathing techniques
8. Birth video (optional)
9. Fun with ice activity or alternative
10. Local resources

## Materials

- *Birthing Ball Comfort Positions* poster, Childbirth Graphics, 2004.
- Birthing ball
- Pelvic model and cloth doll
- *Positions for Labouring out of Bed* poster, Childbirth Graphics.
- Paper towels
- Ice cubes, freezies, clothes peg

## Video Suggestions

- *Understanding Birth*, Chapter Four - *Comfort Techniques*, 2nd edition, InJoy Birth and Parenting Education, 2009.
- *Comfort Measures for Childbirth*, Penny Simkin, 2010.
- *Healthy Birth Your Way: Six Steps to a Safer Birth*, Mother's Advocate, InJoy Birth & Parenting Education, 2010. Free online version at [www.injoyvideos.com/mothersadvocate/videos.html](http://www.injoyvideos.com/mothersadvocate/videos.html).

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## Handouts

- *Healthy Beginnings*, 4th Edition\*, or
- *A Healthy Start for Baby and Me*\*
- *Comfort Techniques—Releasing tension in the head, neck, shoulder, and back.* Childbirth Experience, 2006.
- *Event Training Schedule*, adapted by Virginia Collins from “Beginner Triathlon”, copyright 2008.

## References

- British Columbia - Ministry of Health Services, *Baby’s Best Chance* website, [www.bestchance.gov.bc.ca](http://www.bestchance.gov.bc.ca)
- Grey Bruce Health Unit, *Breathing Techniques for Pregnancy, Labour and Delivery*. Retrieved from [www.publichealthgreybruce.on.ca/family/prenatal/Breathing-Techniques.htm](http://www.publichealthgreybruce.on.ca/family/prenatal/Breathing-Techniques.htm), on January 18, 2011
- *Labour Comfort Kit*, Prince Edward Family Health Team.
- Simkin, Penny et al, *Pregnancy, Childbirth and the Newborn, The Complete Guide*, Fourth Edition, 2010.

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## COMFORT TECHNIQUES

A good massage takes at least 15 minutes to perform. Once you become comfortable giving a massage you may find that you spend even longer doing it so make sure everyone is comfortable before starting.

Position the person receiving the massage in a comfortable position that allows you unrestricted access to the area that you are going to massage. Make sure that you are also comfortable and able to move freely. If you are massaging someone who is lying on their side, use pillows to put between their knees (and under their belly if they are pregnant) this helps keep the spine from twisting.

Strokes are usually done as a sweeping movement using the palms or heels of the hands. Circular strokes use the palms of the hand or the thumbs, raking strokes use the fingertips. Try to keep fingers together when stroking along the muscle. It keeps the pressure even and reduces the chance of provoking pain from uneven pressure of individual digits. Use massage oil or massage cream to prevent friction.

Working from the base of the neck, with hands on either side of the spine, begin to sweep your hands across the shoulders and out towards the sides of the body. Repeat the strokes across the back, dropping to a slightly lower level each time. Do the whole spine down to the tailbone.



Keep massage movements rhythmic and smooth with even steady pressure. Make the strokes balanced on both sides of the back. Do not use short rapid movements, as they cause friction, which can be painful.

Once you have completed that stroke, sweep hands back towards the spine using a light stroke. Always try to keep at least one hand in constant contact with the body. This allows you to be aware of any changes in tension and keeps the connection constant.



Gently check with your fingertips for signs of muscle tension. Where you find an area of tension, do not put pressure on it or try to force the area to relax. Using a circular motion and gradually increasing pressure, begin working from the outer area of tension inward toward the center of the area. This may need to be repeated several times to get the area to relax. Once the area of tension has loosened up you can return to using the longer sweeping strokes to bring heat and blood into the area.

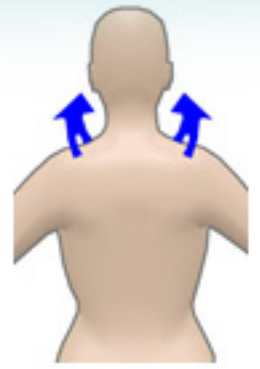
Once the muscles of the back have been massaged, you can begin to work the tiny muscles that lay just on either side of the backbone. Beginning at the base of the neck, gently feel for the top of the spine. Just on either side of the vertebrae, you will find the muscles that you are going to massage. Do not rub the spine directly as that can cause a great deal of pain.



Using your thumbs, make circular strokes to work the tiny muscles. Do this at each vertebra down to the base of the spine. Finish the massage by doing an all over sweeping stroke, working from the spine out towards the heart on both sides of the back.

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To begin the shoulder massage, place a hand on each shoulder where it meets the base of the neck. Gently grasp the muscle in your hands and lift slightly, as if you are kneading dough. You can gently roll the shoulder muscle forward as you are lifting it. Remember to check with your partner for feedback. You may be able to knead the shoulder muscles more firmly as the massage progresses. Knead the shoulder muscle until you feel it loosen up and release its tension.



To finish the shoulders, use long sweeping strokes on either side of the base of the neck along the width of the muscle, always working out towards the sides. Stroke from the top of the shoulder blade to the bottom, just under the armpit. The heels of your hands work well for this stroke.

To massage the neck, position yourself so that you can let their head fall forward and rest in one of your hands. Gently use the kneading stroke (as with the shoulder massage) to loosen the tension in the muscles. Repeat this until the tension is gone and the muscles are loose. Once you have released the tension in the neck muscles, finish by using the sweeping stroke, working from the base of the skull down and out along the shoulders.

Return the head to its upright position before beginning to work on the scalp. Using the fingertips of both hands, lightly push or rake them into the scalp, as if you were giving a gentle shampoo. Work your fingers up from the base of the skull up to the top of the head. Repeat until scalp is relaxed. Be careful not to pull and hairs as you work the scalp.

Relieving tension and providing comfort benefits both parties, therefore giving and receiving feedback is important to ensure that your efforts are working.

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The Childbirth Experience 2006



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## Event Training Schedule

### Vary your training

- Don't just run in preparation for the event.
- Use several different methods to train i.e. cycling, walking, yoga, weight lifting. This will ensure that your whole body gets a workout creates more balance.
- Don't forget to train your mind as well for the event.

### Prepare your mind for the race

- Attitude is important for success. A positive attitude will help you overcome obstacles such as fatigue and fear of failure.
- Determination to achieve your goals will keep you focused on success when facing obstacles.
- Visualize yourself achieving success. See yourself facing and overcoming obstacles.

### Pace yourself

- Know yourself and understand how to and when to push past your fears.
- Believe in your own ability to know your body and what it is capable of.
- Make sure you run your own race at, in your own time and at your own speed.
- Don't be afraid to slow down when you need to rest.

### Take care of yourself

- Remember to keep well nourished prior to the event. Give your body foods that are high in energy so that it has what it needs to keep you going.
- Keep well hydrated during the event so that your muscles work efficiently.
- If you need help, ask for it; don't be afraid to admit that you are not a machine.

### Have your stuff ready

- Make sure that you have all your supplies ready and available for you during the event.
- Make sure that you have a back up plan to deal with any circumstances which may arise (i.e., adverse weather).
- Make sure you have discussed your plans with your support people so that they know how to help you achieve your goal.

### Enjoy yourself

- Don't worry about the end of the event.
- Focus on how well you are taking care of yourself and how this will improve your overall wellbeing.
- Remember that the event is only one day. It is the training that went into it is what will last.

Adapted by Virginia Collins from "Beginner Triathlon", copyright 2008