

## Exercises and stretches to prepare for birth

The physical demands of labour and birth are quite high, so if you can manage to maintain a reasonable level of fitness, strength and endurance throughout your pregnancy this will help you cope better. Even better if during your last trimester you can practice positions that you may use for your labour and birth.

Support deep squats: This a great position to practice as it mimics one of positions that you choose to use to help you through contractions and even go onto give birth in.

It also helps strengthen your legs to help you better hold this position throughout labour and birth, allows the baby to descend deeper into your pelvis ready for birth and the natural downward pull of gravity helps the labour progress.

While in this deep squat position you can concentrate on relaxing your pelvic floor muscles to help with pushing baby out.

All these benefits will help reduce your labour time.

How: hold onto something like a door handle, squat down into a deep squat, hold this position and think about relaxing your pelvic floor muscles while down in this position for about 10-20secs.

I recommend doing 4-8 reps, 2-3 sets, 3-4 days a week leading up to the end of your pregnancy.

Four point kneeling position, leaning back into childs pose/rocking forward onto arms: helps strengthen your shoulders, legs and hips to help hold this position to potentially give birth in.

Tricep dips/strength: help you move yourself around better/push yourself up during labour and birth and also afterwards during the recovery phase.

Butterfly pose; another hip opening stretch, stretching inner thighs and strengthens your pelvic floor preparing you for birth.

Cat/cow, great for easing back aching as they push the baby away from your back providing relief. They also help improve strength of back and abdominal muscles and reduce sciatic and side pains. The quadruped position helps encourage baby down into the birth canal. Inhale to arch your back upwards like a cat, exhale to drop your belly towards the floor (be sure not to drop belly too far down to reduce risk of diastasis recti) holding each position for 5-10 seconds and repeat 10-20 times as desired.

Seated twist, help to release tension along the spine. Sit with legs crossed or one leg straight with opposite foot over straight leg knee, twist your torso around the side of the bent up knee.

Childs pose, helps alleviate back pain, opens up your hips and lower back.

Forward leaning inversion (unless contra-indication because of high blood pressure). It allows temporary relief of pressure off the cervix, allows for room for the fetus and allows for untwisting of any ligaments in the lower uterus and cervix, allowing the cervix to be less tipped or tight so it can dilate in labour more easily. Be sure to kneel afterwards to allow for realignment of the pelvis. It can help with reduction in back and hip pain.



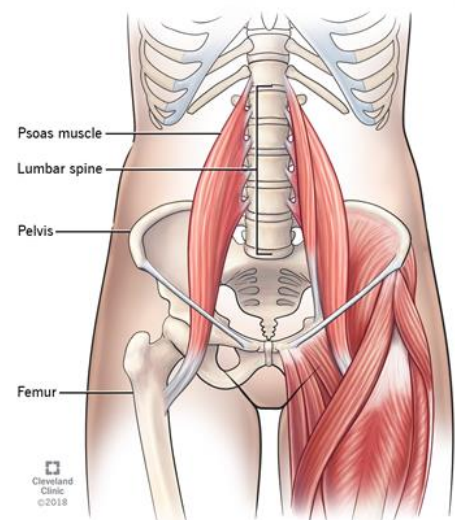
### Exercise to help induce labour

- Walking and/or for warm-up then perform the following
- Rockbacks (4 point kneeling): Rock forward and back, perform reasonably quickly. 6-8 reps. Think about opening up your pelvis.
- Deep supported squats: Rock side to side to open up pelvis at the bottom of your squat and think about opening up your pelvis and baby descending down.
- Swiss ball, hip circles with bounce: Hip circles on swiss ball with little bounces.

Repeat 2-3 times through daily towards end of pregnancy after 38 weeks.

#### Stretches:

- Hip flexors to help open pelvis.
- **PSOAS (so-as)** This is the cradling muscle that runs from your spine around your belly to the front of the pelvis. Its tone can have an effect on descent and positioning of your baby, so you want to have it nice and loose and supple. Try these positions:
- Sitting on a bolster with your hips higher than your knees,
- Daily deep breathing into your belly to relax abdominal muscles



- Lying over the edge of a bed one leg out straight and the other knee pulled up towards your chest (relax into this position and let your straight leg hang to stretch the front of that straight leg hip) and do both sides for 2-5 minutes.
- Lying on the ground on your back with your feet up on a chair, calves at 90 degrees with your thighs and relax in that position for 5 minutes (if you can tolerate this lying position, a short time like 5 minutes is safe)

Benefits of side-lying release include:

- More pelvic mobility\
- Releasing muscle spasm (easier to sleep in pregnancy, less sharp contractions in labour)
- Ease pain in pregnancy and birth
- Make room for baby to turn into better position
- Longer, softer pelvic floor muscles for baby to move through during birth
- Can be repeated every 4-6 hours, since the benefits are temporary of stretching the muscle spindles in the pelvic muscles and lengthening the pelvic muscles for approximately 1-4 hours (suitable to do during labour also).

Source: spinningbabies.com



## Exercises you can use throughout labour

To help you relax, release tension and get in the mindset to prepare you for the rest of labour and birth, think about relaxing and focus on opening up your pelvis to help your baby descending down into your pelvis. Choose positions leaning forward with your pelvis tilted forward to help open it up. A swiss ball is a great support for this.

Childs pose with arms on swiss ball.

Childs pose with chest on ball, rock back and forward, round and round, breath and relax pelvis through contractions. Rest on ball between contractions.

Sit on ball leaning forward with hands on wall, rock your pelvis side/side, round/round.

Standing leaning forward onto your partner/wall/chair/bench doing same movements or peddling feet/legs.

Find your 'rhythm' during labour, something for you to focus on to get you through each contraction; this may be doing things like:

- swaying in a deep supported squat
- swaying on a swiss ball side/side, forward/back, round in circles
- humming through contractions
- pressing a hot water bottle into an area (back/side/belly) that feels good
- think about what feels good to you...?

Once you can no longer talk during contractions, think about calling your midwife to prepare to get to ideal birth place.

Get your partner to massage your back with a tennis ball, this can be good for 'back labour' where you might have intense contractions in your lower back just above your tailbone. Apply the tennis ball to pressure points on your back for relief, +/- gentle massage around back.