

A Guide to Unmedicated Labor & Birth

Tips, techniques, and support for a confident hospital birth experience.

Preparing for Labor: Mind, Body & Baby

Your Mind: Shifting Focus

Preparing mentally is one of the most important parts of an unmedicated birth. Labor is intense, and learning how to stay calm, focused, and confident will help you move through contractions more effectively.

The goal is not to eliminate pain – but to manage it by staying grounded and shifting focus.

Meditation and Hypnobirthing

These techniques help calm your mind, regulate breathing, and shift focus away from discomfort. With regular practice, they can help you feel more in control during labor.

Affirmations

Affirmations are short, positive statements that build confidence and reduce fear. Practicing them ahead of time makes them easier to rely on during contractions.

- “I am strong enough”
- “I am safe and calm”
- “This too shall pass”
- “This pain is powerful, but I am capable”
- “My body was made for this”
- “Every contraction is one closer to meeting my baby”

Guided Imagery

Guided imagery uses visualization to promote relaxation. By picturing calming or positive scenes, you can help your body release tension during labor.



Try This! Hold an ice cube in your hand for 1 minute. Focus on slow, steady breathing, shifting your attention away from discomfort and toward your breath. After 60 seconds, notice how you feel –you just practiced managing discomfort with your mind.

Preparing for Labor: Mind, Body & Baby

Your Body: Strengthening & Stretching

Preparing your body helps improve flexibility, comfort, and your ability to move through labor positions with ease.

Yoga Ball Exercises

Using a yoga ball can help open your pelvis, relieve pressure, and encourage baby's positioning.

Practice gentle hip movements side to side, front to back, and in figure eights.

Kegel Exercises (Pelvic Floor Strength)

Kegels strengthen the muscles that support your uterus and play a key role in pushing and recovery.

To practice: Tighten your pelvic floor (as if you were stopping a stream of urine), hold for 1 second, and release. Do it again, this time holding for 2 seconds, and release. Continue this all the way up to 10 seconds.

Prenatal Yoga

Prenatal yoga helps stretch and strengthen muscles while preparing your body for labor positions. Helpful positions include:

Squats



Hands-and-knees with cat/cow



Lunges and side lunges



Your Baby

Your baby's position can influence how labor progresses. Gentle movement and positioning during pregnancy can encourage optimal alignment.

Try This! Visit the Spinning Babies website at spinningbabies.com for various exercises and techniques to assist your baby with getting into an optimal position for birth. Check out: three balances, abdominal lifts and tucks, and Walcher's.

During Labor: Mind, Body & Baby

Your Mind: Breaking the “Fear-Tension-Pain” Cycle

When fear increases, your body tenses up – making contractions feel more painful. This can lead to more fear, creating a cycle that makes labor harder to cope with.

Recognizing and interrupting this cycle can help you stay in control.

Tips to Stay Grounded

Focus on what you can control (environment, music, position, mindset) and stay as comfortable as possible. Remember your affirmations and replace “I can’t” with empowering thoughts, like “I can do hard things” and “I can do anything for 60 seconds.” You have to believe you can do it!

The following tools can be incredibly helpful to keep your mind at ease and maintain a peaceful environment:

- Aromatherapy/diffuser
- A speaker to play relaxing music
- Dim lights
- Aurora light projector



Your Body: Coping Techniques

Movement and simple comfort measures can make a meaningful difference in how contractions feel. Exploring different techniques can help you find what feels best for you.

For Back Pain

Back pain is common, especially if your baby’s back is positioned against your back. Hands-on support and positioning can help relieve pressure.

- **Counter pressure or hip squeezes:** A support person can apply firm, steady pressure to your lower back or hips during contractions to help relieve pain.
- **Rolling massage:** A massage tool, or even tennis balls placed in a sock, can be used to gently roll along your lower back for relief.
- **Seated positioning:** Sitting backward on the toilet can help relax your pelvic floor muscles and may ease back discomfort.

Positioning

Changing positions throughout labor can improve comfort and help your baby move through the pelvis.

- **Stay upright when possible:** Standing, walking, or sitting upright allows gravity to help your baby descend.
- **Hands-and-knees position:** This position can help reduce back pain and encourage your baby to rotate into a better position.
- **Frequent position changes:** Switching positions every 30 minutes can prevent stiffness, improve comfort, and support your baby’s descent.

During Labor: Mind, Body & Baby

Your Body: Coping Techniques

Support Tools

Using supportive equipment can help you stay comfortable, reduce strain, and maintain positions that encourage labor progress.

- **Yoga ball:** Sitting or leaning on a yoga ball allows gentle movement that can relax your pelvic floor and ease contractions.
- **Peanut ball:** When resting in bed, placing a peanut ball between your legs can keep your pelvis open and support baby's positioning.
- **Birthing stool:** A low stool can help you sit in a supported squat position, which opens the pelvis and may assist during later labor or pushing.

Hydrotherapy

Sitting in the bathtub or shower while in labor can provide soothing relief during contractions. The warm water can help to relax muscles and reduce tension in the body.

Try This! With natural childbirth, using the shower can provide relief at any stage of labor. However, sitting in the bathtub may be best for the transition phase (around 8–10 cm dilation), when contractions are typically the most intense.

Your Baby: Helping Labor Progress

Your movement during labor creates space for your baby to move and rotate. Staying active and open to different positions can help support steady progress.

- **Upright positions:** Standing, walking, or sitting upright helps gravity guide your baby downward through the pelvis.
- **Hands-and-knees positioning:** This can create more space in your pelvis and help your baby rotate into a more favorable position.
- **Stay flexible:** Some positions may feel uncomfortable, but they can be helpful for your baby's movement and overall progress.

Try This! If a position feels challenging but manageable, try to stay in it for 2–3 contractions before switching. Even short periods in a supportive position can make a difference in helping your baby move.

Choosing Your Support Team



The people you choose to support you during labor play an important role in your experience. Feeling safe and supported allows you to stay focused on your body and your baby.

At Elliot Hospital, you may have up to two support people at your bedside, as well as a doula, if desired.

Who to Choose

Take time to think about who makes you feel most comfortable in both emotional and physical situations. Labor is a vulnerable experience, and your support team should help you feel calm, confident, and cared for.

When choosing your support people, consider:

- Do you feel completely comfortable with them seeing you in a vulnerable state?
- Do they help you feel calm and supported during stressful situations?
- Will they stay focused on you and your needs throughout labor?

Choose people who will enhance your experience – not distract from it.

Set Expectations Ahead of Time

Clear communication before you go into labor can help everyone understand their roles and how best to support you.

Questions to consider:

- Do you want your support person with you continuously, or are breaks okay?
- If you have two people, do you want them both actively involved or taking turns?
- Are you comfortable with photos or videos being taken?
- Would you like them to update friends or family, or keep communication limited?
- What helps you feel supported – quiet presence, encouragement, physical touch?

Your birth is your experience. Encourage your support team to focus on your needs, not their own opinions or past experiences.

Considering a Doula

A doula is a trained support person who provides emotional, physical, and educational support throughout labor. If you're thinking about working with a doula, it can be helpful to reflect on the support you're currently receiving. Some patients find that a doula is especially valuable if they are looking for additional guidance, reassurance, or advocacy during their birth experience.

You may want to consider a doula if:

- You don't feel like your questions are fully answered during prenatal visits
- You would like more time, education, or personalized support than your appointments allow
- You want an additional support person focused solely on your comfort and labor experience

If you do choose to work with a doula, it is essential you share your birth wishes and preferences with them to ensure your vision aligns with their practice.

How Your Support Person Can Help

Your support person plays an important role in helping you stay calm, comfortable, and focused. Reviewing this section together ahead of time can help them feel more prepared.

Supporting Your Mind

Labor is both a physical and emotional experience. A calm, steady presence can help you stay grounded, focused, and better able to cope with contractions.

Your support person can help create a peaceful environment by:

- Staying calm and reassuring, even during intense moments
- Keeping their attention on you and limiting distractions like phones or outside conversations
- Helping set the tone in the room with dim lighting, calming music, or aromatherapy, if desired

They can also support you with encouragement and reassurance. Simple phrases can be very powerful during labor:

- "I'm here with you"
- "You're doing an amazing job"
- "You are so strong"
- "You can do this"

If you begin to feel overwhelmed, your support person can help you stay focused by breathing with you during contractions and offering a calm and steady voice:

- "You can do anything for 60 seconds"
- "I believe in you"
- "You're doing it"

Try This! If you start to lose focus or panic, have your support person do the 4-4-8 breathing technique with you in between contractions. Inhale for 4 seconds, hold for 4 seconds, breathe out for 8 seconds. This type of breathing is great for grounding the mind and helping you reset and refocus.

Supporting Your Body

Your support person's role is to help you stay comfortable, respond to your needs, and conserve your energy. They can do this by:

- ✓ **Encouraging movement and position changes:** Gently suggest trying a new position and support you as you move. This might include helping you stand, lean forward, sit on a yoga ball, or get comfortable in bed.
- ✓ **Providing hands-on support when needed:** If you're experiencing back or hip discomfort, your support person can offer touch-based support like pressure or massage – but should always follow your cues and adjust (or stop) based on what feels best to you.
- ✓ **Checking in and responding to your needs:** Your preferences may change quickly during labor. A supportive partner watches for cues, asks simple questions, and adapts without over-directing.
- ✓ **Protecting your energy and focus:** By taking care of small tasks, like adjusting pillows, setting up the bath, or communicating with staff, they allow you to stay focused on your labor.

How Your Support Person Can Help

Supporting Your Baby's Progress

Your baby's position can influence how labor feels and progresses. Your support person can be especially helpful in early labor by guiding gentle positioning techniques, and later by encouraging continued movement and flexibility.

In Early Labor: Helping Baby Get into a Good Starting Position

Early labor is a great time to encourage your baby into a good starting position.

Your support person can help guide you through the Miles Circuit, a series of three positions designed to support alignment:

- They can help you get into each position comfortably
- Keep track of time so you can relax into each phase
- Stay nearby to support you and offer encouragement

This can be especially helpful if labor feels slow to start or if your baby may need help finding a more favorable position.

During Active Labor: Supporting Ongoing Movement

As labor progresses, your baby continues to rotate and descend. At this stage, your support person's role shifts to encouraging movement, helping you into new positions, and assisting with transitions as labor changes.



Try This! Explore the Spinning Babies website at spinningbabies.com for step-by-step guidance on techniques for you and your support person to try, such as abdominal lifts and tucks, supported squatting, and gentle rhythmic movements.

For more information, helpful tools, and resources to support you during pregnancy and birth, visit ElliotHospital.org/PregnancyCare.