

BREATH, COMMUNICATION, AND TOUCH

Breathing

Sustainable,
Adaptable, Useable

Pink **KIT**
METHOD®

Breathing: Sustainable, Adaptable, Usable

Published by Common Knowledge Trust
P.O. Box 892
Nelson, New Zealand
www.commonknowledgetrust.com

Editor: Kayla D. Rau

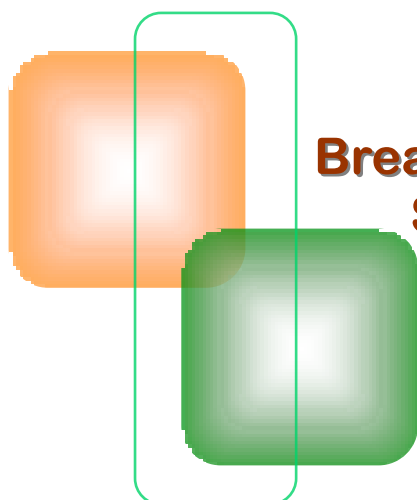
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ISBN 978-1-927144-09-1

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Birthing Better with The Pink Kit Method®
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Breathing: Sustainable, Adaptable, Usable

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Breathing is Certain

Over and over again, you'll be reminded that, until you are in labor, what will happen is an unknown. But here are two certainties:

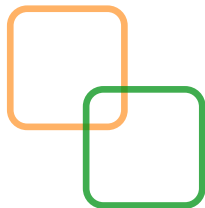
1. You'll breathe throughout whatever experience unfolds
2. There are many skills and personal attributes you can bring that WILL make a huge difference in how you deal with the events of this birthing experience and how you feel for the many years that follow.

Birth memories are powerful. Do not just focus on your coming birth; also focus on how your coming birth will impact the memories you'll have the rest of your life.

Too often, we forget that our present-day behaviors will become tomorrow's memories. But think back right now on the moments of your day so far. What types of memories do you have? Maybe some are good, some rushed, some full of irritation. Perhaps you had moments of love, shame, curiosity, frustration, or gratefulness.

Our memories are powerful. Our memories of our children's births are powerful sources of all sorts of emotions. Of course, it is much better to have positive memories even if the whole experience wasn't perfect. Remind yourself that there have been many problematic events and situations in your life so far, and your best memories of those are when you handled yourself in a way you privately admire. For your wonderful memories, remind yourself that some terrific things just happen to you and other good things happen because of how you responded or behaved.

While we can't always control what happens, we can always control how we respond to every single moment of our lives. But most of us don't exercise our conscious awareness on a daily basis. Most of us just live and let live. However, childbirth, like our wedding day, graduation, violin performance, or any other significant event, deserves our utmost conscious awareness.



Once you fully accept how powerful and important the birth of your child is, you will take seriously your need to take at least one well-learned skill with you into the activity. If you learn nothing else from your Pink Kit, learn how to breathe well.

Labor + vaginal birth

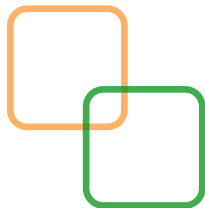
Reality check. Throughout the series of contractions that open the cervix, eject the baby, expel the afterbirth, and cause the post-birth uterus to return to normal size, women breathe. However, breathing will change directly dependent on how the pain connected to the stretching open of her cervix and other bodily changes is perceived. The breathing of women will change less if there is little perceived pain and will change more if the pain is challenging.

Breathing skills are so very essential that their importance cannot be stressed sufficiently. Often, women who have previously given birth comment, “It was the breathing that got me through,” or “Next time I’m going to breathe in with more focus.”

You’re going to breathe during labor anyway, so you might as well make your breath work for you, using specific types of breathing that will help at each stage of every contraction, including the rest period (see “The 5 Phases and the Bell-Shaped Curve” and “Getting from Here to There in Labor”). Also use these skills to deal with pre-labor tension and anxiety.

Caesarean

This is one of your “Must Do” resources, as well. If you use no other Birthing Better Pink Kit skill please be conscious of how you breathe. Just as in a vaginal birth, you’ll breathe anyway. You’ll breathe on the way to the hospital, while being prepped, during surgery, and in recovery, so you might as well make both your inhalation and exhalation a consciously focused skill. This changes your attitude from just being a lump on a table being “done to” to a mother working with her baby’s efforts to be born.



You also have the power to include your partner. Breathing together is a great form of intimacy and something others don't even need to know you are doing. It's calming and gives a sense of connectedness.

VBAC

If your previous Caesarean was preceded by a labor, you might not have used your breathing effectively even if the Caesarean was due to a true medical need. If your Caesarean was performed because you became exhausted and so did your baby, learning effective breathing is paramount for you. Either way, you might not have known to continue to use any breathing skills during the surgery. This may have left you feeling more disconnected than you would have liked.

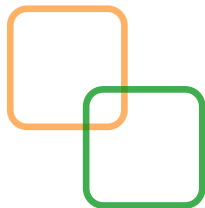
If your surgical birth was not preceded by a labor experience, you may not have used any breathing skills during the operation. In this case, you want to make certain you have the best breathing skills possible as you work toward your goal of having a labor and vaginal delivery.

We can't stress enough how important it is for you to learning these breathing skills. There is no doubt that women who want VBACs have to work harder, with more willpower, to achieve a labor and vaginal delivery than those who have never had a surgical delivery.

Coach

All humans indicate their relaxation and stress through their breathing. Babies are big. It takes a lot of effort to let such a big object out. Birthing women reflect that effort in their breath and what they do with their body, either positively (by breathing well and staying open and relaxed) or negatively (by using a stressful breathing style, holding tension, and fighting the process).

Your job is to help your partner maintain a good breathing pattern. As humans, we do all breathe the same way, with minor variations. This means you will feel the same things in your body as your partner while you practice together. You'll be useless if you do not integrate breathing skills into your own body. As soon as you



feel the different types and variations, you'll develop the empathy your partner needs. Once that empathy matures, you will also be able to help her (and yourself) use more relaxed breathing patterns. Also visit <http://birthingbetter.com/expectant-fathers-blog>

Labor and Breathing

Breathing is so much a part of our day-to-day lives that we seldom give it a thought. You might have learned specific breathing techniques for certain activities, such as singing, playing a wind instrument, running, doing yoga, and so on. Some people debate whether pregnant women actually need to be taught how to breathe at all — women are often told by birth professionals, or in books about birth, “Don’t worry, you breathe anyway! You’ll know what to do.”

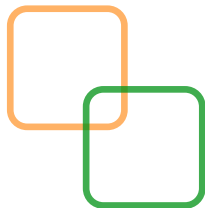
The majority of breathing techniques taught in childbirth classes aim to keep the diaphragm off the top of the uterus, thus hopefully reducing pain. These techniques were particularly popular in the US in the 1960s thru the early 1980s. The benefits of these breathing techniques included the following:

- having a focus
- having a way for the coach to breathe along with the birthing woman

But there were two major drawbacks:

- Women could hyperventilate, which produces very unpleasant physical symptoms, including dizziness and tingling of the lips and fingers.
- With breathing taught as a “technique,” many women were not able to adapt the breathing when there was an increase in pain. There’s nothing more frustrating to learn a skill and then find yourself saying, “It didn’t work for me.”

In the same way that athletes develop ways to breathe that improve their performance, you can learn ways to breathe that fit the very specific requirements of labor and delivery contractions. Even though labor and giving birth is a normal part



of many women's lives, it is also an athletic event, a performance, a one-off experience, a peak moment, and it requires very good breathing skills.

How you breathe matters

Babies still get born even if a birthing woman screams for hours. From that point of view, no, breathing doesn't matter. However, these skills aren't about whether or not your baby will come out or you just getting through it—they are about how you manage yourself and how you feel about yourself during the labor and afterwards. From this viewpoint, teaching yourself does matter, and using your skills matters, too.

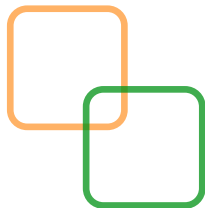
Let's look at the difference between a woman who is using her breath well to manage and cope with labor and one who is not.

During a contraction, a woman who is birthing well uses her breath

- as a tool to relax
- in a rhythm that helps her focus, especially when contractions have intense sensations
- to gather energy
- to release the built-up energy of intense contractions
- adaptively as contractions become more intense
- to indicate to her coach when she needs help
- to discipline herself to stay on top of the pain when the contractions are intense

A woman who is finding it hard to cope with the sensations might

- release too much energy by screaming, grunting, groaning, or moaning, or making high-pitched, stressed sounds
- breathe very fast or shallowly
- pant for extended periods during each contraction or in the rest period between contractions



- breathe very, very quietly, in a manner that does not suggest she is managing well, perhaps with a lot of grimacing
- hold her breath as a tool to cope with the intensity
- be unable to settle the breath between contractions, and therefore never really relax or feel prepared for the next contraction

Here's a caveat. There are moments in labor when it's so very tempting to just cry, moan, groan, or even scream. Do it, then work to get your breathing back together as soon as you can. Throughout life, we sometimes have to let it rip, but feeling out of control during labor for a length of time just leaves terrible memories, particularly if you knew you could have managed or behaved better.

Let it rip!!

One woman used her breathing very well for most of her birth, but, internally, she felt this incredible energy building up, and she finally decided to let it rip. She shook her head back and forth and screamed. She scared the wits out of her partner and mother. They got really concerned.

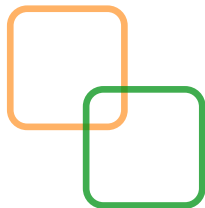
After three contractions like that, she said during a rest, "That feels better." And she went on to control her breathing again and move along with her labor.

A Team Effort

You each have a particular job to do. The specific skills and focus for both the laboring woman and the coach are defined here so you can work effectively together.

Woman

If you typically have performance anxieties about something that will happen in the future, temper them for labor and birth by seeing the memory you can create from observing yourself performing well, then work toward that goal. If you can imagine yourself having behaved, coped, and worked well with painful contractions, you can work toward that goal by learning and using the skills that will get you there.



Breathing comes naturally; breathing well when you're in pain is a learned, practiced, and used set of skills.

Coach

You can learn to read her breathing by developing a good ear, which you do from listening to your partner practice and listening to the second breathing track on the "Birth Journey" CD. Once you've learned these breathing skills, you will absolutely be able to hear the difference between effective breathing and stressful breathing, and thus know how she is dealing with the pain she is feeling at the moment. Her breath will also indicate whether her contractions are effective or ineffective (see "The 5 Phases and the Bell-Shaped Curve"). You are so important to keeping the labor going and helping her cope.

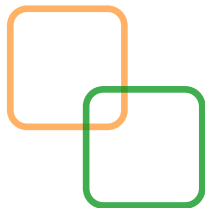
Here's a great story that shows clearly how effective teamwork is, even without telepathy.

Ooops

A woman told a friend that she had really chosen the best and most relaxed breathing for herself when she gave birth to her first baby a few months earlier. She went on to explain that, as labor became more intense, she would think between contractions about how she could apply a particular type of relaxed breathing that she had learned in her Pink Kit package when the next contraction came. She found herself managing beautifully.

Then she began to question whether this preplanned breathing was actually making a difference, or whether labor pains were just less intense than she had thought they would be. So she decided not to prepare her breath for the next contraction.

She was SO surprised at the result. The pain immediately became overwhelming, she felt panicked, and she could hear her breathing become hysterical—all in that one contraction! She told her friend that she was freaked, and it took her four or five contractions to get her control back. She then explained to her friend that she could only get her breathing under control again because her husband knew all this information.



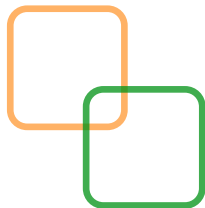
Her husband told his side of the story. He said that he was so very impressed with how well his wife was coping with contractions that were obviously very painful. Then, from one contraction to the next, she lost control and freaked. Of course, he had no idea that she was pre-planning her breathing NOR that she had decided to not use a relaxed breathing style for that one contraction. Her decisions were all in her head, and no one can read anyone else's mind.

What he saw was simple. She had been fine for hours, then suddenly she wasn't. He said he didn't try to figure out what the cause was. He just absolutely knew he had to get her back on track right then and there. He didn't wait at all. He immediately used modeling and the 5 Phases.

He went on to explain that, during the space between that first out-of-control contraction and the next one, she just shut him out. During the next space, he was able to get her to work with him. The next contraction still freaked her, but as it backed off once again, their teamwork worked as it did for the next space between. He said this was not easy to do. He was afraid he couldn't help, that she wouldn't let him, and that their birth providers might think he was "telling her what to do." But he said he just couldn't stand by and let her feel so out of control.

By now, two more contractions had gone by, and in the next space between she was able to open her eyes and show appreciation. He could tell that she knew he would absolutely, unconditionally continue to work with her. She began to put her own willpower, determination and focus back into play. He says it took four or five contractions and spaces in between, but they did it. In fact, he said, it brought them closer together. In the earlier part of labor, she seemed so in control that he wasn't certain how he could help. After this episode, she got back into control that he greatly admired; however, now he knew how to work with her as she needed, AND she was better at communicating to him how and when to help.

The woman then said to their friend, "I totally trusted my husband after that. Before, I wasn't certain he could empathize with what I was experiencing, but after I freaked out, I realized that he truly wanted to help me feel powerful and in control of this incredibly dynamic



experience and that we (as parents and husband and wife) were doing this together. We had conceived this child in love. We were going to parent together. We birthed together.”

You can see from this story that teamwork is absolutely essential! Not only does it get you through the panicky spots, but it also brings the two of you closer together.

You’re about to teach yourself an effective, sustainable type of breathing for use during and between contractions. You’re also about to learn how to vary your sustainable breathing as labor pains get more intense.

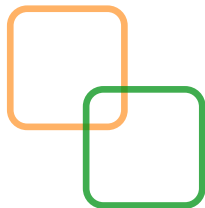
The Four Basic Ways of Breathing

All humans breathe in one of these four basic ways:

1. in the nose/out the nose
2. in the nose/out the mouth
3. in the mouth/out the nose
4. in the mouth/out the mouth

So far, so obvious—we never breathe in through our eyeballs and out through our fingertips. However, these basic ways of breathing have variations. Also keep in mind that growing your awareness is as important as learning skills. As you’ll learn in this resource and in “Directed Breathing,” there is no single correct way to breathe during labor, only variations of the best ways—i.e. those that are sustainable and adaptable and that relax and renew you.

Let’s define “sustainable breathing.” If you can keep using one type of breath for an extended period of time, it’s sustainable. But you will discover that there are some types of breathing that, although sustainable, are not “useable.” Breathing types that help you relax, stay focused, reduce tension, and stay in control are useable. And to be really effective, a breathing type must be “adaptable”: it must be able to accommodate changes in sensations during the birthing process.



Your goal at the end of this segment is to know which types of breathing and which variations create relaxation and openness, and are therefore both useable and sustainable, and which create tension or aren't sustainable or best not used. You'll discover which types/variations help you personally renew your energy, as well as which make you tired. You'll also find out that the best types/variations are always adaptable to change. It's all about making choices to use what helps you cope, rather than find yourself saying such things as "Can't be bothered" or "I can't do it." You can, and, once you're a parent, you'll have to. Go back to the "Pregnancy: The Time Before" and "Childbirth" resources to remind yourself of this life Gateway.

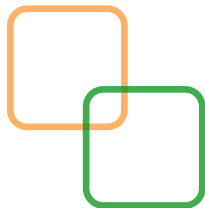
Don't bring a pen and paper to take notes. FEEL and become aware. When you write something down, you intellectualize, merely learning as though you will have to repeat the answers in a written test. Your test will be the physical application of what you are about to learn. You'll recognize many of these breathing types/variations because we all do them. We just haven't thought about them. Now you're connecting your brain (conscious awareness) and your body. You'll be able to think about what your breathing is telling you about how you feel internally or what you are doing. You'll also be able to hear what another person's breathing is telling you and if you can help them feel more comfortable.

Type #1: IN the Nose/OUT the Nose

Just breathe in/out your nose. Don't force it; don't change your normal breathing in any way. Don't become self-conscious, although you might laugh, which will then change your breathing. Seriously, just notice that you do breathe this way and rarely pay attention to this type of breathing. We usually only pay attention to our breathing when it changes from what is normal and relatively unconscious to some other type of breathing pattern.

EXERCISE: AWARENESS

Pay attention to how much of your day is spent breathing like this. Notice what you are physically doing when you breathe like this. Also notice what you are doing when you're NOT breathing like this.



Like most of us, you probably found out that you use this type of breathing

- when you are relaxed
- when you aren't thinking about your breathing
- most of the time

Yes, there are people who have a perpetually stuffed nose—sorry. You'll have to adapt this whole resource to what you can do.

Now let's think about how this type of breathing can be altered. This is vital information. The reason good breathing types can adapt to the increase of intensity during labor is because each type of breathing can be varied.

EXERCISE: DOING

Variation a: Breathe **fast and shallow** in and out the nose.

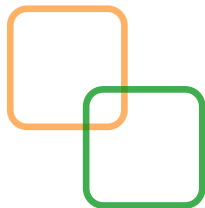
- Do you feel relaxed or tense breathing this way?
- Can you expand on your inhalation or relax on your exhalation?
- Could you do this for an extended period of time?
- Does this variation make you feel renewed or tired?

If you answered “No” to any of these questions (which you did), you know that this variation is not one of your positive breathing choices.

Variation b: **Deep and slow** in and out the nose.

Ask yourself the same questions:

- Do you feel relaxed or tense breathing this way?
- Can you expand inside your body on your inhalation or soften/relax on your exhalation?
- Could you do this for an extended period of time?
- Does this variation make you feel renewed or tired?



EXERCISE: AWARENESS

Compare Type 1 breathing in its normal form (our typical breathing) to variations a and b.

If you can't really feel what your body does when you breathe more quickly compared to when you breathe more deeply, watch the clock for one minute while you breathe in these two variations. That should be enough time for you to feel the physical effects.

Type #1 breathing in labor

In labor, you might find yourself using either of these variations, and that is where choice becomes the basis for your behavior. Choice is always available.

If you breathe fast and shallow (variation a), even if it's in/out your nose, this is a stressful variation of Type 1 breathing. If you use variation b, you can create relaxation and renew your energy.

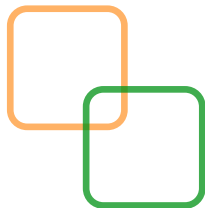
You can also control this type of breathing by counting in and out to the same count for both inhalation and exhalation. Some women like that very controlled breathing as their focus in coping with labor sensations.

Normal

Use your everyday, normal Type #1 breathing when the sensations aren't too intense and between contractions as you're regaining composure. Although you can use this normal type of breathing, you will begin to become more aware of your breathing. The early period of labor brings awareness so even your normal breathing develops in you the focus to help yourself relax. It's effective throughout the whole day of surgery, too, if you're having a non-laboring Caesarean.

Variation a

This is a stressful way of breathing. You need to recognize it quickly and immediately change how you inhale and exhale. Coach, if you hear this variation,



you have to model and help your partner get back to a more relaxed and renewing type of breathing.

Variation b

This is relaxed way of breathing and can be used in any of the 5 Phases of a contraction.

Type #2: IN the Nose/OUT the Mouth

EXERCISE: AWARENESS

Pay attention to how much of your day is spent breathing like this. Notice some examples of what you are actually doing when you breathe like this. Also notice what you are doing when you're NOT breathing like this.

You probably found out like most of us that you use this type of breathing

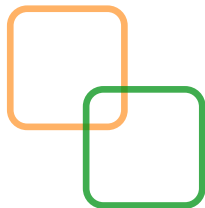
- when you meditate
- when you are physically active
- during sex
- when you're about to cry or trying not to cry
- to intentionally relax yourself

EXERCISE: DOING

Variation a: Breathe in your nose, then drop your jaw and sigh out your mouth.

- Do you feel relaxed or tense breathing this way?
- Can you create expansion on your inhalation and relaxation on your exhalation?
- Could you do this for an extended period of time?
- Does this variation make you feel renewed or tired?

Variation b: Breathe slowly in through your nose. Then blow-breathe out your mouth after making your lips into a circle. This is a slow "blowing out the candles."



- Do you feel relaxed or tense breathing this way?
- Can you create expansion on your inhalation and relaxation on your exhalation?
- Could you do this for an extended period of time?
- Does this variation make you feel renewed or tired?

Variation c: Inhale through your nose, short and sharp like a big sniff. Then scream out your mouth. Yes, scream.

- Do you feel relaxed or tense breathing this way?
- Can you expand on your inhalation and relax on your exhalation?
- Could you do this for an extended period of time?
- Does this variation make you feel renewed or tired?

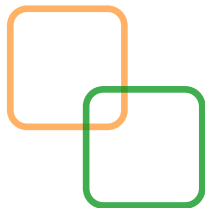
Let's look at **Variations a** and **b**. Both of these variations create expansion and relaxation, but in different ways. Most people feel relaxed throughout their whole body when they drop their jaw and sigh out their mouth. But many people feel more in control when they use Variation b, making their mouth into a circle for the exhalation. Some women use only a slack-jaw exhale, others only a blow-breath exhale, while others vary which one works best for them at the moment.

What's great about your Pink Kit skills is learning that there is more than one way to achieve the same goal. This means you have many options to adjust and modify your skills depending on what you are experiencing.

Let's look at **Variation c** now. Your direction in doing this variation was to exhale with a scream. The lesson here is that the spectrum of this type of breathing ranges from deep relaxation, to controlled breathing, to just beginning to feel stress, all the way to screaming. It doesn't take a genius to figure out which end of the spectrum you want to be at when you're in labor!

EXERCISE: DOING

Types #1 and #2 breathing are the sustainable, adaptable, useable breathing behaviors used by women who use breath as a **focus**. They



- are easy to modify.
- help her to control her surrender to the birth process.
- can be sustained by coaches who are breathing with her.
- can be easily modeled.
- lead the way to positive birthing behaviors.
- make sense.
- are achievable.

Woman

This is your “practice”: during the day, play around with Types #1 and #2 and their variations. If you are constantly in public, do it in your head. Lots of learning goes on internally. No shame in that. In some ways, it’s a very deep form of learning, because you know when you’re cheating yourself, spacing out, and not focusing.

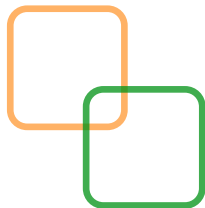
Ultimately, though, you do need to do the breathing types and variations in front of others. Giving birth is not the time to be shy about anything you do or any bodily function.

Practicing both types and their variations on a daily basis makes it is easier for you to

- hear yourself
- adjust your breathing so that you have more control
- maintain a good focus when you need it
- use your in-breath to bring in energy
- let go of the excess energy with your out-breath
- help your coach know how to assist you when your breathing indicates you’re finding the contractions a bit too much

Coach

Learn as much as you can about keeping your partner opened in her body and relaxed, focused, confident, and in control of her breathing. Learn about which variations within Types #1 and #2 are best for your partner. Game-play and do role-reversal with breathing. Have your partner listen to your breathing, and tell her what



you've learned about your own ability to relax or tense up. Remember the importance of empathy as outlined in "Teamwork."

How your partner breathes throughout the whole birth experience is getting down to the nitty-gritty. If she breathes one millisecond in a stressed way, she will feel on the verge of being out of control. Think about how panic starts. It starts with the awareness that you're feeling out of control, then proceeds if there are no coping skills/action plan.

Type #3: IN the Mouth/OUT the Nose

EXERCISE: AWARENESS

Think about when you breathe like this. You have, but not often, unless you have a perpetually stuffed nose.

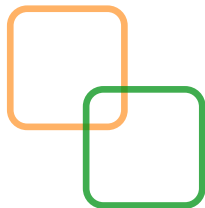
This type of breathing is not actually a true type of breathing, in that we don't breathe this way for any length of time. It's an indicator that we use

- when we are exasperated
- when something sudden happens, like diving into cold water
- as our first response to shock

EXERCISE: DOING

Try breathing in this manner for one minute, and see how you feel.

You can't always stop this type of breathing from happening, because labor does produce unexpected sensations and responses. If you do or hear this type of breathing, know it's a reaction rather than a skillful response. Intuition and instinct are not sustainable behaviors, so either your next breath will be focused, heading toward coping/managing and feeling in control, OR you will start to breathe in a stressful, tense manner. Childbirth requires a counter-intuitive approach to pain and very measured behaviors. Women who have birthed well know this. Recognizing



this dysfunctional variation and working toward a positive breathing pattern is what matters. Behind this is choice, even if it's not entirely conscious.

Woman

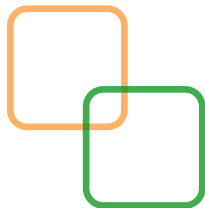
In labor, you might find yourself using this type of breathing

- as an instinctive response to a suddenly intense contraction. In other words, this might be the first breath in/out you find yourself using as a particularly painful contraction starts.
- if you are already not coping well with your contractions, another one is starting, and you don't feel capable of managing this next one either ("OH NO, NOT ANOTHER ONE").
- when something unexpected happens (for example, a medical procedure) that makes you uncomfortable.
- as you fall asleep between contractions in the latter stages of labor (which is normal and natural), but then wake up in an intense contraction and don't have enough coaching support to manage it well.
- if you didn't learn to use your breath and so just react strongly to contractions, rather than skillfully respond to them.

Coach

This type of breathing isn't sustainable, and you won't hear it often. If you hear her doing this, get her back to one of the first two types as soon as possible (nose/nose or nose/mouth).

If she gets sleepy, encourage this rest period. Close your eyes and rest, as well. However, it's vitally important that, as soon as she starts to respond to the next contraction, you give her your full attention (see "Getting from Here to There in Labor").



Type #4: IN the Mouth/OUT the Mouth

EXERCISE: AWARENESS

Think about when you breathe like this.

We often use this type of breathing when

- we are doing something very physically active and we're out of breath.
- we've been using Type #2 (in nose/out mouth) and are trying to get back to Type #1 (in nose/out nose)—our deepest sighing.

In labor, you might use this type of breathing if

- the sensations of contractions are very, very intense
- you're not coping at all, and haven't been for a considerable period of your labor
- you feel panic about the pain (not that you think there's a problem; you just hate the sensations)
- you are beginning a deep relaxation from a heightened state of stress or attention

EXERCISE: DOING

Try breathing in this manner for one minute, and see how you feel.

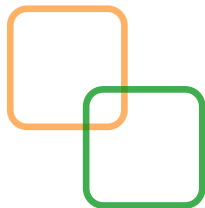
Variation a: Create a sharp and quick inhalation and exhalation out your mouth.

This variation makes this type of breath negative, and it requires change toward a more positive way of breathing. It causes hyperventilation and its negative sensations: tingling in lips/fingers, light-headedness, and nausea.

Do not let this type of breathing continue for any length of time.

Variation b: Pant.

Some childbirth education teaches a woman to pant as a proactive and focused type of breathing, particularly for 2nd Stage. But if it is artificially applied as a technique, panting can cause hyperventilation, as well as a very dry mouth and exhaustion.



In 2nd Stage, it is common to hear reactive panting. This is quite normal, if it is not too exaggerated. But panting keeps the energy locked in the chest. All sounds in labor and delivery should be going downward, not upward. Always get the breathing back to less-stressful variations, especially if the panting becomes screaming, moaning, or groaning.

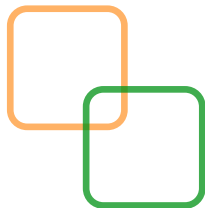
The Cleansing Breath

If you store the energy from the contraction that has just passed, you will anticipate the next contraction with fear, and you won't be able to manage it as well. There is no doubt that the Cleansing Breath, which has been taught and used by women since the early 1970s through Lamaze, is absolutely vital in discharging the excess energy that builds up inside women during intense contractions.

EXERCISE: CLEANSING BREATH

Practice this and USE it. Work on it together. Takes turns in each role so you both know what it feels like.

- 1) Time a minute-long “contraction” and use the bell-curve breathing pattern, breathing together with eye contact, or with the woman focused on an object, mental image, or with her eyes closed.
- 2) As the contraction is coming to an end, moving from Phase 4 to Phase 5, the coach models a deep in-breath (in through the nose) and a very relaxing out-breath (out through the mouth, with a slack jaw). Both the in-breath and out-breath are very exaggerated, which is what makes it so cleansing: the in-breath brings in fresh energy and the out-breath lets go of stored energy.
- 3) Repeat the inhale and exhale two more times. Relax more fully each time.
- 4) Don't stop opening your body and relaxing inside. Spend the next two minutes doing the *Pelvic Clock* and relaxing any other place the coach suggests.



Labor will happen one contraction at a time. After each contraction, you need to

- finish this one
- let it go completely with your Cleansing Breath
- don't think about the next one—just apply relaxation skills to your rest period
- do the next one when it comes
- mentally stay in the present (refer to “Staying in The Now”). Hard to do? Sure.

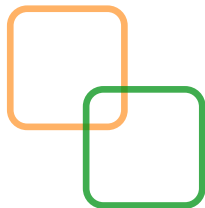
Cope with the present

If I thought about the next contraction, I'd feel panic rising in my mind and chest. My mother and sister really helped me to stay in the present. I could always cope with the present, just not with the future.

Practice How to Breathe

As with all your Birthing Better Pink Kit skills, you have to practice good breathing (see “The Importance of Being Practiced”). This will enable you to go into labor already using many of your skills. Using the few weeks before labor begins to coalesce these skills is incredibly important. Your Birthing Better Pink Kit skills are meant to begin as your pregnancy transitions into giving birth. In other words, practice progresses from setting aside time each day to go over bits and pieces while incorporating the skills into other daily activities to using your skills to respond to pre-labor sensations, even if they are not painful.

Listen to the second part of the “Birth Journey” audio CD and practice your relaxed breathing as many times as you can in the last few weeks of pregnancy. Doing so is your very best practice, since you can't actually go through a practice labor. Become aware of using the types and variations of breathing that keep you relaxed, and start to use them during pre-labor. That's true for all pregnant women and their birth partners, even if they are planning a non-laboring Cesarean. This period has both tiredness and busyness for all pregnant women, so you'll have plenty of moments to utilize one or more of your skills.



As the both of you begin to use your skills, you will gain confidence in yourselves and figure out how to apply your skills now that things are moving along.

KISS—Keep It Simple, Sweetie

One father put it this way: “We prepared with our Pink Kit package, did all the work. In labor, it boiled down to ‘Breathe, relax, focus; breathe, relax, focus.’ That was my monologue for 15 hours. We had an absolutely amazing experience together.

“This is what I’ll say to other fathers: ‘DO the work!’ Whatever we ended up using, we both knew what I was talking about, because we had done the work together.”

Modeling

If the woman starts to struggle, the coach can show her the positive skills to use by **DOING THEM HIMSELF**. We call this modeling. Both of you need to practice being in each role so you know what your partner is facing.

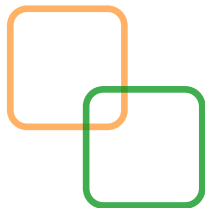
Coach

Coaches with few labor-coaching skills often believe that whatever way the woman is breathing must be right, so they let her continue even if the woman knows she isn’t breathing well. One of your most effective labor-coaching tools is creating a model of good breathing patterns for her to follow when she needs help.

If you hear your partner begin to struggle with her breath, it’s easy for her to **FOLLOW** a good breath cycle (in and out). During labor, she may prefer words, actions, gestures, or nods over modeling (see “Communication”). You’ll learn to vary how you use all the skills you’re teaching yourselves according to her preferences.

Woman

You may or may not find it easy to follow the other person’s breath during an exercise; however, it’s a great tool that has been used during labor by lots of coaches. If you start to get off track during labor, usually all the coach has to do is model one breath cycle, and you’ll get back on track. Many of us have used modeling and



following during every intense contraction, and it worked well. So work on your willingness to follow your coach now, and you'll develop the skill of modeling and following to use during labor.

Modeling the breath works well

My husband was wonderful. When those intense contractions happened, I got pretty frightened. He was right there, breathing with me. I just looked into his eyes, followed his breath, and somehow it all became more manageable. At one point, he needed to go to the toilet, and I thought I'd just lose it. Fortunately, my sister had just arrived, so he gave her a quick lesson and she took his place.

EXERCISE: MODEL AND FOLLOW

Try this with ALL four types of breathing.

- 1) **Recipient:** Breathe using one of the non-sustainable breathing types discussed earlier. Pretend you're not quite in control.
- 2) **Doer:** Use Type #1 or #2 breathing to model a sustainable and relaxing pattern they can follow.
- 3) **Recipient:** Change your breathing to match the model the Doer is giving you. Use eye contact or a focus, such as watching the other person's chest, while you follow their breathing.

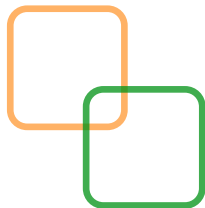
This exercise replicates what both of you can do in labor to work together, so practice it periodically, particularly as you get closer to term.

Breathing during Labor

Breathing and Contraction Pain

Woman

The way you breathe during a contraction will be a direct reflection of how you are managing and coping with the intensity of the energy produced. The more intense (painful) the sensations, the more intense your breathing pattern will be.



When you have pain in childbirth, each inhale and exhale can make the difference between coping and losing it. When you are coping well with the sensations of labor pains, your breathing will be controlled, focused, and intentional. When you are not coping, your breathing will sound ragged, and everyone will know you are having trouble getting on top of the contractions. For anyone who has had a labor, you know this is so accurate. Your breath indicates to both yourself and others whether you are feeling overwhelmed by the naturally occurring pain or doing okay.

The one exception is women who become incredibly withdrawn and quiet, hate labor, but look as though they are coping. These women rarely have skills and feel isolated and alone.

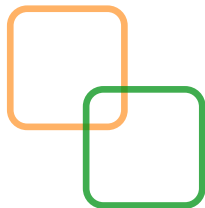
Yes, you will breathe throughout labor, but it's your choice whether you use your inhalations and exhalations as a tool for labor management or just let the power of contractions carry your breath down the road of sounding stressed and out of control. This is what will frighten your partner and have your birth providers suggesting you use pain relief if you're in the hospital. If you're having a home birth, your support people will have to work very hard to keep you from wanting to go to the hospital for pain relief—or you'll have to work very hard to prevent them from dragging you in!

No one can get you to use good breathing patterns. Only you can choose how you use each inhalation and each exhalation to maintain the necessary internal opening and relaxation so essential in helping your baby move through your body.

Coach

No matter where you and your partner have your baby, the use of breath to manage labor pain cannot be understated. This means you must listen to whether your partner is coping with the pain by how her breath sounds.

This is the most important thing you need to know. If the pain your partner is experiencing is not connected to a problem, it's just the naturally occurring pain that does occur in childbirth (see "The Whys and Hows of Pain"). Your role is to prevent



your partner from feeling out of control and unable to manage the pain. The BEST way to prevent her from being out of control is to really listen well to her breathing. If she even begins (even BEGINS) to breathe in a stressed manner, you absolutely must immediately begin to work with her breathing. Use each of the 5 Phases in an individual contraction to help her maintain her control.

Breathing and Negative Emotions

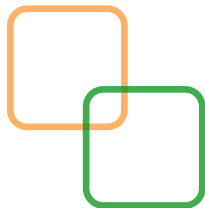
You'll find plenty of opportunities during your pregnancy to practice, practice, and practice good breathing. You might feel stressed — with the kids, your job, the car — or just feel tired or physically poor. Or you might find yourself more out of breath as you climb stairs. Use the sustainable breathing you are about to learn to reduce tension, gain energy, and immediately feel better.

In fact, you can increase your ability to control many negative emotions with good, relaxed breathing. In labor, this is the secret: learn to control your choice of breathing style even during contractions you don't like, or when assessments, monitoring, and procedures are happening to you.

Your Goals

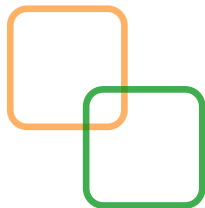
Poor breathing is often the first indication that a woman isn't managing the sensations she is feeling. Breath is also often the simplest and best focus to use while you are in labor as a tool to work together. Remember that this part of the Birthing Better Pink Kit resources is only about one skill, and there are also many other skills to teach yourselves.

Now that you have practiced and understand how to create relaxed, sustainable, and useable breathing skills, you are ready to set your goals for your birth experience. Commit to becoming self-aware of how your breath can reduce tension, fear, anxiety, and feeling out of control.



Woman

- Really focus on each in-breath and each out-breath.
- Work on developing a style of relaxed and sustainable breathing. You need to PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE Types #1 and #2 and the variations of them that work best for you. Develop a rhythm: count or measure the in-breath and out-breath, or do whatever else works for you.
- If visual stimulus is distracting, either keep your eyes open and use your gaze to help you focus on a specific object or spot opposite you on the wall, or keep them closed.
- Use variations of sustainable breath to manage each of the working phases in a contraction (see “5 Phases and the Bell-Shaped Curve”).
- Focus more intensely as the intensity intensifies.
- Use your inhaled breath to expand your bony pelvis (see “Bony Structure”).
- Use your *Directed Breathing* to relax especially tense or painful areas (see “Directed Breathing”).
- Use your exhale to relax after each inhale, softening all your soft tissue inside your pelvis (see “Soft Pelvis”).
- Consciously inhale good energy, whatever that means to you.
- At the end of each contraction, use your breath to free any leftover intense energy. Exhale with Cleansing Breaths.
- Help your partner know how to help you—help can vary moment to moment.
- Convince your partner that you will rise to the challenge even if it’s the most difficult thing you’ve ever done. It is this willpower and determination that is the basis for the totally satisfied feeling so many women have felt and want you to feel, but you have to work for it.
- Monitor the sounds you are making to make sure they are sustainable and don’t sound stressed. This does NOT mean to be quiet, nor does it mean you can’t make strong, animal-like sounds. But if you think you sound stressed, work to find a better breathing pattern.
- If you really need to discharge the energy vocally, don’t hesitate: cry, scream, moan, rag, whine, chew out everyone—then come back to the breathing style that keeps you focused.



Coach

- Learn to hear the subtle and not-so-subtle breathing changes that occur when your partner feels pain.
- Learn to hear the breathing difference between effective contractions and inefficient ones and how to help your partner create and accept the sensations of effective contractions.
- If her breathing sounds stressed, be willing to immediately help your partner find a good breathing pattern that keeps her focused, relaxed, and in control. Don't let one contraction go by without your help if she needs it.
- Continue to work with your partner's breath through each and every Phase of each contraction. Use one or more of the 5 Phases to help her regain her good breathing if she slips.
- Commit to working with your partner's breathing for as long as is necessary, no matter where you are or what is happening around you or to your partner.
- Convince your partner that you will absolutely use at least your breathing skills to help her, and then live up to that.
- Work together to use each breath cycle as both a focus and to relax.
- Model a sustainable type of breathing that she can mimic, if necessary.
- Use common language to help her regain a good breathing pattern (see "Communication").
- Praise her for her positive breathing style and breathing success.

Letter to a daughter

When I had you, I was by myself in hospital, so afraid, in so much pain. The Sister on duty came in and told me to be quiet and not make so much noise. So I was terribly afraid for you when you told me that you were pregnant—a parent never wants their children to suffer. All the suffering I went through to give birth to you was worth it, but I didn't want you to go through that.

When you asked me to come to your birth, I couldn't imagine what help I could give you. You taught me about breathing when you worked through the Pink Kit. I thought it was a bit odd, but did as you asked.



At the beginning of your labor, we talked about what you really wanted, and as the contractions got more intense, my first response was to become frightened. But my little girl was stronger than I was, and you told me to work with you. I gathered my courage and did as you asked.

I can't thank you enough, dearest daughter, for the healing you have given me. I learned that women can feel wonderful about labor, even if it hurts. I learned how important it is for women to be taught how to breathe. We laughed and cried for weeks. We both spend hours looking at our precious little girl and know that the cycle of fear has been dissolved. I am blessed.