

PAIN & TENSION

# Relaxation

*Pink* **KIT**  
METHOD<sup>®</sup>



## Relaxation

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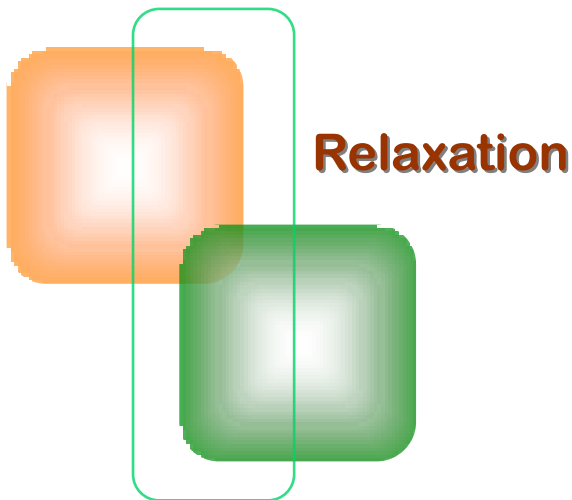
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Birthing Better with The Pink Kit Method®  
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## How You Feel

Tension in labor requires a special response: relaxation. This module is an outline of relaxation skills as found in a number of your Birthing Better Pink Kit resources.

It's very important for you to see relaxation as a distinct quality and goal applied through a number of skills. Relaxation helps both the bony pelvis (by softening muscles to allow bone movement) and the soft pelvis (by allowing it to open more easily). Women who can physically and mentally relax internally definitely

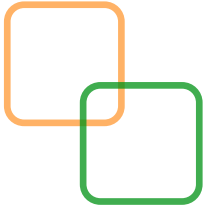
- birth better with more control and confidence in managing labor pain.
- help their baby move down, through, and out of their body more easily.

By learning to recognize your areas of tension and how to relax those places, you can help your body open to the experience and move your birth along.

Think about the journey your baby must take, moving through and opening up all the interconnected tissues of your soft pelvis, all within the confines of the pelvic bones. Once your baby has made that journey, its final leg is to open the soft tissue of its birth canal (your vagina).

Without skills, the image of your baby opening you up can be pretty intimidating. But once you learn these skills, you'll feel much more capable and confident about your ability to open your body to let out this big object.

Always keep in mind, you do not have to love the experience or even like it in order to know you are managing the experience really well. Don't focus on whether confidence, trust, lack of fear, intuition, or instinct will bring you an "enjoyable" experience. It's frosting on the cake if you enjoy labor. Some women actually love being in labor. Some hate it. Regardless, skills carry the day, and all women can feel incredibly proud of their ability to work with their baby's efforts. And certainly, all



men can feel equally empowered by knowing they have truly helped and not just stood around or offered ice chips.

## **Going Beyond Yuck**

Using a life analogy to understand the task of childbirth, think back on some time you did not feel well, yet went off to work. Of course, you sort of wanted people to notice that you weren't feeling well. At the same time, you still had to do all the complex tasks required in your job. Because you felt yucky, you might have heard your inner voice telling you how sick you were and you "can't keep working" ...yet you did. To get through the day, you probably put some coping mechanisms into play that weren't normally necessary for your tasks.

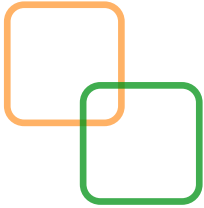
Labor is a lot like that. Because you're pregnant, you have to accept that you will give birth. You might feel yucky on the day it happens or not like the circumstances around the birth while you are doing it. But you have to put your coping mechanisms into play, just as you do when you go to work feeling poorly. Giving birth isn't something you plan; it's an activity you do.

## **Planned Caesarean**

Relaxation is as important for you as for a woman who will labor, whether her birth ends in a vaginal or surgical delivery. When you're in a dentist's office, relaxation is about the only thing you can do. Is having a Caesarean like being at the dentist? Yes and no.

On one hand, the prep for surgery, the actual operation, being stitched back up, and immediate recovery is a lot like a dentist appointment. Added to this is the epidural and your inability to feel or move your lower body.

On the other hand, unlike a dentist appointment, the birth of your baby is an activity with something big at stake: your first effort at connecting with the child you will spend the next two decades raising. Being passive in this activity can leave you experiencing a sense of detachment.



Even in a surgical birth, it is the time for you to pay attention to the opportunity to work with your baby's efforts to be born by using relaxation skills. You do this for yourselves as parents-to-be, for the memories that will be with you and your family throughout life, for the skills you can pass on to your children, and for all other families who have planned Caesareans.

Changing childbirth is one of the goals of this course: growing a skilled pregnant/birthing population so families naturally use skills throughout their baby's birthing journey.

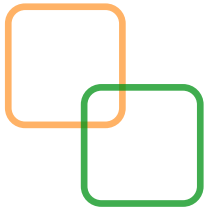
## Relaxation and Teamwork

Everything about becoming pregnant, giving birth, and being a parent is about teamwork. If your teamwork is not practical and workable and has distrust and disagreement, neither of you will feel the great achievement experienced by so many Birthing Better Pink Kit families.

The teamwork required to create relaxation should not be underestimated. Yes, as the birthing woman, you will work hard to relax, which sounds funny—how can you relax if you're working hard? Yes, as a coaching dad, you also have to work hard to help your partner do her hard work in a relaxed manner. So both of you are working hard, yet, somehow, this work must be energizing and relaxing rather than exhausting, stressful, and producing tension. Tough goal, but your Pink Kit skills achieve this very thing.

Start with learning to recognize conscious tension within your own body and see it in another person. Creating relaxation comes from recognizing the signs of tension. Once you see and hear tension, it will make common sense to you. Without cues, you would have no idea.

Often, we ignore other people's body language and let them get on with their life, but in childbirth, the sooner you spot tension (birth coach) or feel tension (birthing woman) and the faster you work together to create relaxation, the better.



### **Woman**

Even though relaxation is possible to achieve and maintain through your conscious action, as a birthing woman, you need a LOT of willpower to intentionally relax when you are also feeling pain. And you need your partner in his role as coach to pay a LOT of attention. But it has to be the right kind of attention. Your partner's Pink Kit skills will help him do just that, yet you must communicate clearly, too, as mentioned in the "Communication" resource.

#### ***EXERCISE: CONSCIOUS TENSION IN ME***

Make a list of where you think you store conscious tension, and share it with your partner.

- Can they see it?
- How do they know when/where you are tense?
- Is the tension in your body, emotions, or what you're thinking?

#### ***EXERCISE: CONSCIOUS TENSION IN YOU***

Take turns as Doer and Receiver on this exercise.

- 1) **Doer:** bunch up your shoulders. You can feel you are doing this consciously, and your partner can see this tension.
- 2) **Receiver:** Give a verbal or non-verbal cue to get them to relax their shoulders. You can tell them to relax, touch your partner's shoulder, or massage it.
- 3) **Doer:** Relax under the instruction, whether touch or talk.

Relaxing inside your pelvis is where you need to focus your attention. Your baby is not coming out your shoulders! It's easy to see conscious tension in the shoulders, but if you are sucking in your belly or rectum because of the pain you feel, your partner cannot see that. You'll learn skills for this in other resources.

### **Coach**

As a man, you could feel utterly helpless during the process of birth if you don't have the right skills. And your partner desperately wants you to be skilled. Women





often go into birth with a mixture of anxiety and excitement. The anxiety is profoundly reduced when she knows you know how to help her.

The practice you do is as vital as what your partner does. In other words, there are ways to practice most of these skills on your own, as well as together. You need to fine-tune these skills during the weeks before the birth so you are confident about what you are seeing or hearing. If you don't achieve this ability, you won't know whether you should do something.

Coach, you set up these next two exercises.

***EXERCISE: OBSERVING WELL***

Face each other.

- 1) **Woman:** Close your eyes and relax your forehead.  
**Coach:** Notice how her face looks when it's relaxed. This is how her forehead will look if she's coping okay with contractions during labor.
- 2) **Woman:** Keep your eyes closed and imagine something has just hurt you: you slammed your finger in a door, burned your arm on the oven, or started having massive menstrual cramps.  
**Coach:** Her forehead is probably wrinkled. Look for other facial indications of her pain. These tell you that she's beginning to hold tension somewhere.

This is the first clue you have. You won't know what your partner is thinking; you'll just be able to see how she's reacting to the internal sensations. Keep in mind that all the sensations are caused by the efforts your baby is making to open up her body in order to come down, through, and out. Never lose sight of how big your baby is. Don't lose your empathy for how challenging it is to open one's body for such a big object.

***EXERCISE: LISTENING WELL***

Face each other.





- 1) **Woman:** Close your eyes and breathe in a relaxed, everyday manner, which is most often in and out of your nose.
- 2) **Coach:** If she is coping with the contractions, her breath will sound similar to this.
- 3) **Woman:** Again, imagine that you are in pain, and let it show in your breathing, without using any words.  
**Coach:** If her breathing sounds distressed, it's because she's finding the sensations of the contractions intense or painful, and she's having trouble coping.

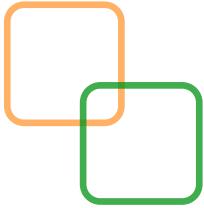
For more about listening to your wife/partner's breathing, look at the "Breathing" and "Communication" modules.

Now, your job is to use your great male brain and ask yourself some of these questions. They become automatic after a while, once you really get that the whole reason for the activity of giving birth is to get a big object out of a container. Your practical side will take over, and you'll start to figure out the three-dimensional relationship between your partner and your baby.

So ask yourself

- **where might she need to relax?** e.g. inside and around her pelvic clock (see "Soft Pelvis")
- **what type of tension might she need to let go of?** e.g. conscious, unconscious, structural, or stretching (see "Tension")
- **how can you work together** to resolve that tension? e.g. "Let's do the *Sit Bone Spread*" or "Let's use this next breath to relax a bit more" (see "Bony Structure" and "Breathing")
- **why is she storing tension** at that moment? e.g. "You need to lift your torso up to get a better alignment for our baby, just a little—try that" (see "Body Positions")

Couple all that knowledge with good verbal and non-verbal "Communication" skills. And always use your deep, relaxing, "Right Touch."



And all of the above has to take place no matter what position your partner is in.

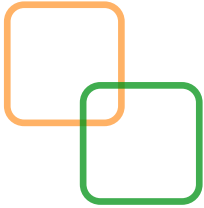
- Sitting down
- Facing back of chair sitting down
- Standing
- Walking
- Upright facing back of chair while kneeling on floor
- Sitting on floor on one hip
- Kneeling on one knee behind chair
- Sitting between and on chairs
- Kneeling between chairs
- Sitting on coach's knee
- In the shower or tub
- Lying on her back or side on the bed

## **Experiencing Passive and Active Relaxation**

You probably have never thought about whether relaxation is passive or active. When you receive a massage, this is passive relaxation. Someone is doing something to you with the intention to create relaxation in you. When you are trying to reduce your stress, this is active relaxation, which is something you do for yourself.

Birth is a bit of both for both of you. Take turns as Doer and Receiver. Often, the attention during pregnancy is on the woman; however; both of you need to help each other throughout pregnancy, during birth, and while you're parenting. So take turns and help each other achieve relaxation.

By changing roles, something happens. When women take the "role" of being the birth coach, they learn how hard it is, gain more empathy, and realize the birthing woman absolutely must communicate, or her coach won't know what she's thinking or needs. When men take the "birthing role," they realize that the experience is not just about them, but about their relationship to the baby!



***EXERCISE: PASSIVE RELAXATION***

- 1) **Doer:** Touch the Receiver lightly with the tips of your fingers only. Begin at the top of the head, and slowly move down the body, touching wherever you choose (e.g. shoulder, hands, joints, hip, leg). Don't move too quickly. Your touch will trigger the Receiver's mind to pay attention to each specific place being touched.
- 2) **Receiver:** Just notice where you are being touched, and direct your breath to each place. Develop your inner awareness of that place.
- 3) **Doer:** Learn to work with the Receiver's inhalation and exhalation: move to another spot at the end of an effective exhalation so the Receiver can now breathe into the new spot.

Although the Receiver is using a breath cycle at each place being touched, they may not be doing too much relaxing.

***EXERCISE: ACTIVE RELAXATION***

- 1) **Doer:** Repeat the above, but this time, use the flat of your hand to encourage deeper and more active relaxation. Keep paying attention to the Receiver's breath cycle so you move your hand at the end of their exhalation.
- 2) **Receiver:** This time, you will both inhale under the palm touch as well as soften and relax on your exhale.

You may need to take a wee bit of time to get the coordination between breath cycle and touch, but it's well worth it. Working together in this manner grows the depth of teamwork so necessary for the work of birth, and it has so many more applications throughout life.

## **Relaxation Skills**

Yes, conscious tension is the simplest to relax, because we're more aware that we are creating it. That is why we focus here on unconscious tension, because most of us don't have a clue how to extend our awareness to or relax it.



Unconscious tension softens in a subtle way, as you'll discover. When we relax conscious tension, like our shoulders, they pop down. When we soften inside our pelvis, we feel tension melt or spread. But keep in mind that all you need to create is the ability of one object to slide by another object, as you learned in the "pinch thumb and forefinger" exercise in the "Tension" resource.

## Unconscious Tension

- √ **Soft Pelvis:** *Cervical Relaxation* works with the deep inner tissue of the lower back. *Pelvic Clock* used in full can prevent or counteract unconscious tension. It's also an excellent distraction from the pain of dilation.
- √ **Body Positions:** *Position Your Body* to allow relaxation and let your body open.
- √ **5 Phases:** Let tension go with *Breath* and *Language* skills and cues. *Deep Touch* and *Static Touch* to relax muscles and connective tissue.
- √ **Communication:** Self-discipline over your Negative Voice will help you work with and go along with the pain.

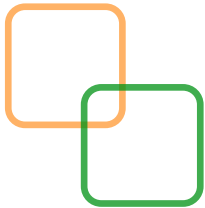
## Back labor: 1<sup>st</sup> Stage

- √ **Bony Structure:** *Kate's Cat*, *Sacral Maneuver*, *Letting Down Reflex*, *Hip Lift*, and *Sit Bone Spread* are all movement exercises that can be used to release sacral tension and relieve back labor.

## Stretching Tension: 1<sup>st</sup> Stage

The lowest part of the pregnant uterus, which includes the cervix, is connected to the inside of the bony pelvis. The uterus, cervix, and bony attachment are all "soft tissue." The soft tissue of the top of the vagina simply spreads out and covers the bones of the pelvis.

Contractions pull the lower part of the uterus (which IS the top of the vagina when pregnancy is advanced). This action pulls open the cervix. If there is tension where



the soft tissue attaches inside the pelvis, the work of the contractions can't effectively tug open the soft tissue of the cervix.

- √ **Soft Pelvis:** *Pelvic Clock* during contractions and in between can help the contractions draw the cervix back into your bony pelvis. *Cervical Relaxation* during and in between contractions can help keep the cervical cells relaxed and open your cervix. In a subsequent birth, the process of cervical dilation usually proceeds faster because the cells have learned how to respond to the contractions and let go of any tension they have more quickly.

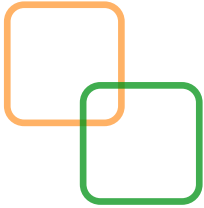
### Stretching tension: 2<sup>nd</sup> Stage

- √ **Bony Structure:** *Sit Bone Spread* gives you hands-on assistance for creating extra space, as well as internal relaxation to allow the soft tissue to stretch.
- √ **Soft Pelvis:** *Internal Work* BEFORE THE BIRTH to make those internal muscles more elastic—the more often you do this **before** the birth, the less tension and pain you will feel **during** the birth. *External Massage* for the external perineal muscles. *Letting Down Reflex Relaxation* helps you ride along with the internal sensations of the baby moving down and out. *Breathing into the Perineum* helps you ride along with the unfamiliar stretching of the pelvic outlet.

You cannot do too much *Internal Work* in the last eight weeks of pregnancy. Most women will comment on whether they've done enough! So learn from the thousands of mothers who've come before you. Doing this massage will not only greatly reduce the burning stretch, but it will also allow your baby to move more quickly through your birth canal rather than be delayed or stuck because you are tight or tensing up in reaction to the sensations of such a big object coming out of you.

### Structural Tension: 1<sup>st</sup> Stage

- √ **Bony Structure:** *Mapping Your Pelvis* familiarizes you with your bony structure before the birth, and you can practice being open and relaxed throughout that area. *Hip Lift* relieves hip pain and creates space on either side of the pelvis. *Sacral*



*Rock* relieves back pain by creating more space in the front-to-back dimensions of the pelvis. *Kate's Cat* creates more space in the front-to-back dimensions without weight bearing.

- √ **Soft Pelvis:** *Pelvic Clock* and *Directed Breathing into the Perineum* will create relaxation from the inside out.
- √ **Body Positions:** *Position Your Body* to choose positions that are not weight bearing and which don't cause rigidity in your bones.
- √ **Breathing:** *Directed Breathing* into the bony parts creates bone mobility.
- √ **5 Phases:** Develop *Breath*, *Language*, and *Touch* as the foundation for effective teamwork. Coaches are vital if the birthing woman needs hands-on assistance to help her let go of her tension.

### Structural tension: 2<sup>nd</sup> Stage

- √ **Bony Structure:** *Pubic Arch Spread* helps you make more space at the front of your pelvis. *Sit Bone Spread* helps you create side-to-side space, along with keeping your sacrum expanded.

### Lingering Labor

The trick to avoiding a non-progressing, lingering, or plateau labor (when the cervix stops dilating or the baby doesn't continue to move down through the bony tube) is to figure out which part of the birthing body the baby needs to or is trying to open. In other words, does the baby need to

- open the diaphragm (cervix) — dilation
- move through the hole in the tube (pelvis) — “coming down”
- open the aperture (vagina/birth canal) — pushing stage and birth

Yes, you need to work as a team to think through what is happening. A lingering labor is always a 3-dimensional issue that can seem hard to sort out, but the reason for the plateau will often make sense if you think it through. If your labor plateaus, you'll become aware that the contractions are no longer getting longer, more intense,



or closer together. And your birth provider will likely give you information throughout labor as to the “progress” (see “Progression of Labor”).

Although using your Birthing Better Pink Kit skills may keep your labor progressive, if your labor hangs up, work with your Pink Kit skills to make a change in the relationship between the birthing body and baby. In other words, find the internal tension, and relax and soften specific places inside to get that “melting” feeling. Yes, some form of internal tension is by far the most frequent cause of lingering labors.

Use *What do you want to do now* from the “Teamwork” resource and *The Fascination Principle* from “Staying in The Now” to identify what you need to do and where you need to do it.

## The Goal

Your priority is to keep the labor progressing, so your baby is born without unnecessary delays or trauma. Rather than instinctively pulling away, resisting, or holding back, you need to develop a new “instinctive” skill: you need to learn to open up to the experience, identifying and intentionally relaxing any painful areas. Both of you now understand that any tension can be changed, softened, and relaxed once you know where and sometimes what causes the tension. Even bones can move relative to one another, if you can relax and soften both the muscles and connective tissue that hold us all together.

Actually, the skill of relaxation is not really all that new to you. What do you do when you have a muscle pain? You try to relax it, or massage the area to reduce the tension. This is the sort of response you are working toward making your default. Put simply, you want to do something to focus on something other than the sensations and to reduce your discomfort.

Even if there is a great deal of pain, you still need to reduce internal tension by choosing to soften and relax. **This is always a choice.** Your mind puts the intention



## Relaxation



of relaxing into your body. Your mind either says “I can and I will” or “I can’t and I won’t.” And your Pink Kit skills give you the focus to override your reactions. No matter what you think or feel, you always have two choices in labor: use skills or don’t.

Learning your Birthing Better Pink Kit skills is thrilling because each set of skills interlocks with the others. As you become more competent in one area, this enriches your ability to learn the next set, and so on. And it doesn’t matter where you started working through these resources. The skills are interwoven and can be learned on their own or in layers, depending on whether you want to take a dip or a dive.