

Do Not Tense Up—Open Up

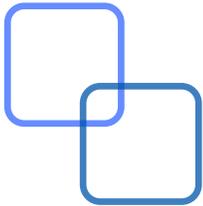
During birth, stretching you open is what your baby does. Unfortunately, opening up to such a large object as your baby can make you feel you are being torn apart and ripped open. Your body's normal reaction is often to tense up against the stretching. These "too-intense" sensations have been associated with the word "suffering" that people worldwide have attached to birth.

What most pregnant women don't realize is that tension usually plays a major part in how much difficulty a baby will face as it makes its efforts to be born. Sadly, a lack of simple skills means that too many women store internal tension in their bodies during labor. This is so common that it is one of the main causes of hung-up, long, tiring labors that too often lead to increased medical intervention. As that is the case, you need to learn to open up and work with the painful stretching. When you achieve this, it is more likely the idea that you are "suffering" will go out the window.

Tension inside your body is something you can control once you've learned how. First, you need to understand tension, then you learn how to get rid of it. Reducing tension is not intuitive or instinctive. Reducing tension is a learned skill and often hard to apply when you instinctively want to tense up. In other words, you need to be counter-intuitive to let go of deep, inside tension during your baby's passing through your body.

If your labor progresses, your baby is telling you he/she has room and space to move through. If labor feels stuck, it's important to reduce internal tension so your baby has more space. Both mothers and fathers want to know, how much more space needs to be created?

Here's an exercise that will help you understand tension and relaxation. Once you get this, you will never be afraid of childbirth again, because you will absolutely



know “I can do this.” You’ll use your thumb and index finger to represent tension between your baby and the inside of your body.

EXERCISE: JUST ENOUGH SPACE

- 1) Squeeze your thumb and index finger together tightly.
- 2) You have just produced tension, and your thumb and index finger cannot move relative to each other. Let’s say your index finger is your baby and your thumb is your body. When there is tension, nothing moves.
- 3) Now choose to soften your thumb while keeping it touching your index finger.
- 4) Notice how simple it is to slide your index finger over your thumb.

You don’t need to create lots of space. You just need to create the ability of one object (your baby) to move through another object (your body). You do this by choosing to soften and relax any tension you might have.

Right now, this is simple to do. But when you are experiencing the naturally occurring intense pain of contractions, relaxing can be challenging, because every fiber of your body wants to tense up in reaction to the pain. We all know this from experiencing pain at different times in our lives.

Instinctively pulling away from pain is **a natural response**, as are strong emotional reactions to pain we can’t control. BUT tensing up inside works against your body’s efforts to open up for your baby. You might not like the pain and want to tense up, but you have a responsibility to more than just yourself now —you also have a responsibility to your baby.

Giving birth is always an effort made by two people: you and your baby. Your baby is working to come down, through, and out of your body, and you must work with your baby’s efforts to do so. Without skills, it’s really hard. With skills, you can do this.

Throughout these Birthing Better Pink Kit resources, both of you (woman and coach) will do exercises that help you reduce internal tension. Luckily, tension and its