

PAIN & TENSION

TENSION

Pink **KIT**  
METHOD<sup>®</sup>

## Tension

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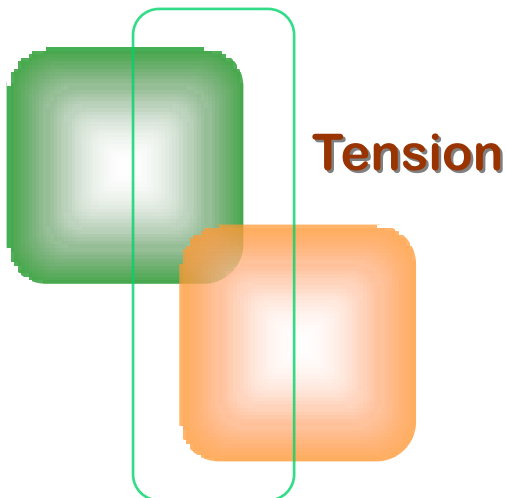
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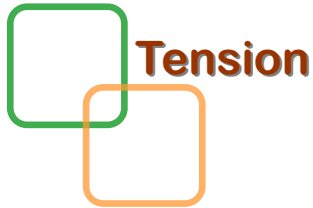
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## Do Not Tense Up—Open Up

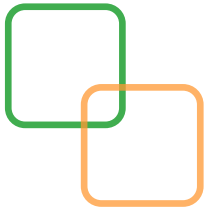
During birth, stretching you open is what your baby does. Unfortunately, opening up to such a large object as your baby can make you feel you are being torn apart and ripped open. Your body's normal reaction is often to tense up against the stretching. These "too-intense" sensations have been associated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

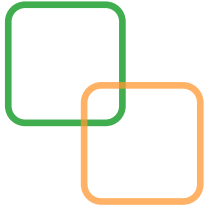
You don’t need to create lots of space. You just need to create the ability of one object (your baby) to move through another object (your body). You do this by choosing to soften and relax any tension you might have.

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



opposite, relaxation, can be felt in both your bodies, because men and women share the same soft tissue: muscles, ligaments, tendons, and connective tissue.

## Soft Tissue and Tension

Muscles, tendons/ligaments, and connective tissue are all variations of the soft tissue. We need to distinguish between these. Our organs are also part of our soft tissue, and we don't confuse our heart with our lungs—we know they function in different ways and respond to different stimuli. The principle reason to reduce tension in the soft tissue in childbirth is simple: tension can hinder your baby's ability to move down, through, and out of your body.

### Muscles

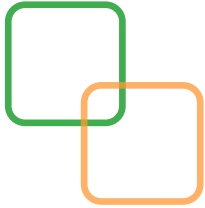
Muscles are part of the larger, soft-tissue system in our human body. Men and women have the same muscles. We use them the same, as well. Muscles are used in everything we do. Primarily, the big muscles on the outside of our body are familiar, but, as you become more Pink-Kit skilled, you'll become familiar with some of the internal muscles, as well.

Your muscles can store tension, which is the form of tension we're most familiar with. All of us have experienced muscle cramps, tight muscles, and even torn muscles.

#### *EXERCISE: EXPERIENCE YOUR MUSCLES*

Both parents, tense up in your lower belly and your rectum.

**Women:** Ask yourself, "Would I be helping my baby come down, through, and out of my body by doing this?" Your job during the birthing process is to let go of any muscular tension you feel "down there." It does not matter if you have tense shoulders or how much your husband/partner massages them to loosen them up. Your baby is NOT coming out your shoulders.



**Men:** As the birth coach, can you see that your pregnant partner has tensed up her rectum? Probably not, but when you tense up your own rectum, you KNOW that you'd be hampering any big object trying to move through that tense area.

### Ligaments

Your ligaments and tendons

- act as “puppet strings” that move your bones,
- work to contract and relax your muscles, and
- attach the muscles and bones together, keeping the bones in the right relationship to another.

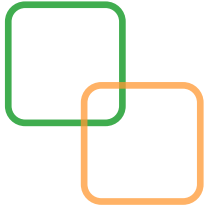
You might have had injuries that affected your ligaments or tendons, such as a torn tendon, tennis elbow, RSI (overuse syndrome), or a sprained ankle. They all hurt. However, tendon tension is a bit vaguer than muscle tension, so here is an exercise to help you learn how to identify it.

#### *EXERCISE: FINDING OUT ABOUT YOUR TENDONS*

Both the woman and the coach must do this exercise.

- 1) Hold one arm straight, and put the fingers of the opposite hand on the inside of your straight elbow. You will feel a large tendon inside the bend of your elbow.
- 2) Bend your arm. Notice what happens to the tendon when you make this motion—it springs up. Press on it, and feel how tight it is.
- 3) Now straighten your arm, keeping your finger on the tendon. When your arm is fully extended, press on the tendon again. You'll notice that it's softer.
- 4) Hold onto that spot, and just initiate the very beginning of bending your arm. Just initiate! Notice that even at the very, very, very beginning of the motion, the tendon tenses up.

Tendons and ligaments are found deeper in our body than most muscles. You'll recognize their specific type of tension as you read further in this resource.



## Connective Tissue

Connective tissue is a white sheet, interweaving through every part of the body, holding all your organs in place and attaching one part to another. It works as the “living glue” that holds you together. (You can see connective tissue when you take the skin off a chicken and de-bone it.)

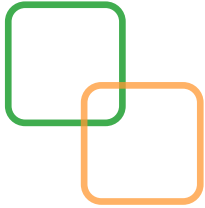
Just as with muscles and tendons/ligaments, connective tissue can be either stiff, restricting movement, or pliable, allowing movement. Once you experience the ability of connective tissue to hold tension, you will know that tension/relaxation occurs in more than just your muscles and tendons. In fact, learning to relax in the connective tissue produces a better and deeper type of relaxation that you can use in all aspects of your life, from reducing stress to preventing sports injuries.

### *EXERCISE: YOUR “POWER OF INTENTION”*

Both of you do this: look straight ahead and keep your head still throughout the exercise until instructed otherwise.

- 1) Put one index finger up to your temple, and push against the side of your head. Consciously (by intention rather than lots of tensing up) decide to keep your head still—don’t let your finger turn your head.
- 2) While you’re pushing, relax the muscles in your shoulders and neck. You can easily lift and lower your shoulders and still keep your head immobile. Keep pushing without letting your head turn, and keep relaxing your shoulders and neck.
- 3) Now, “choose” to let your head turn with your finger. To make this change, your mind has to instruct your body to let go of the tension in the connective tissue sheet of your neck and the base of your head. There is some degree of muscle engagement, but most of the immobility you created before was caused by tension in the connective tissue sheet.
- 4) Now try tensing up the muscles of your neck and shoulders while your finger pushes against the side of your head. Choose to let your head turn while your muscles are tense. You can actually feel that the connective tissue sheet’s mobility is deeper than tension created by your muscles.





You have just experienced how you can affect mobility **by your intention**.

When you hold your head still and don't let it turn, you are creating

- immobility
- rigidity
- fixedness
- hardening

These can all block the progression of labor and your baby's ability to move through your pelvis or birth canal. Actually, the connective tissue is far stronger than muscles or tendons and can maintain tension longer. This knowledge gives you a BIG boost as you make choices about pain that makes you want to tense up when you know you shouldn't.

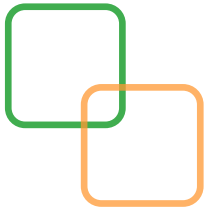
During labor, even when there's pain, you want to create

- mobility
- flexibility
- movement
- softening.

You have discovered your muscles, tendons/ligaments, and connective tissue. Now that you know where tension is stored, you have to discover the types of tension that these soft tissue components can create.

## Different Types of Tension

There are four types of tension that are relevant to birth. Some are very visible, while others are hidden inside us. It is the deep, hidden tension that is most important to reduce, because our baby obviously comes down, through, and out of our inside.



## Conscious Tension

This type of tension is under our conscious control. As a human being, **you can choose to both create and relax conscious tension.** It is the natural, tensing-up reaction we have to pain, fear, anger, and even exercise. Conscious tension is easy to recognize. If you tense up your shoulders and pull them up around your ears. If someone is upset, you can sometimes see them clinch their jaw or make a fist.

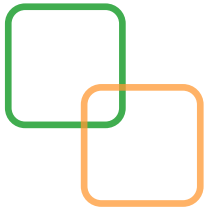
If a woman tightens up her bum muscles during a painful contraction, even that is conscious tension. She might not know she's doing it, but it is her natural reaction to the pain she's feeling yet one she can learn to control.

### Visible or hidden

Since men and women have the same muscles, both of you can create the same conscious tension. And conscious tension can exist inside our body, as well as outside. But the outside tension is the only kind that's visible. For example, you can't see another person tighten up their rectum. But you can feel yourself do it.

Most visible tension is conscious. This means it is actually a chosen behavior, within our conscious awareness, and so it is easier to work with. You can tell a person to relax their shoulders, which they may or may not choose to do! Or you can touch someone's shoulders, and if they know this is a cue to drop them and relax, hopefully they will choose to do so.

In other words, another person can see outside tension and even do their best to create relaxation, but if the tense person doesn't want to relax, they won't. It's all about your teamwork. As a birthing woman, you must use your mind to require your body to relax even when neither your mind nor body wants to. As a birth coach, you must observe tension and keep cueing your partner to reduce it. Common sense tells both of you that the sooner tension is discovered, the easier it is to reduce it.



In earlier years, childbirth preparation encouraged the “rag doll approach” to childbirth. The woman mentally scanned her body and relaxed any tension she found. This was an attempt to reduce or prevent visible conscious tension. However, the rag doll concept missed an important point: it’s possible to be relaxed on the outside yet tense on the inside.

Here’s an exercise that will help you realize that we can have external **relaxation** and internal **tension** or the reverse, external tension and internal relaxation. The latter is the reason why some women spit their baby out very fast—any internal, hidden tension is minimal (said another way: their internal relaxation is maximal) and doesn’t prevent the process of childbirth from moving right along in a “progressing labor.”

### ***EXERCISE: RAG DOLL***

Both of you should experiment with this.

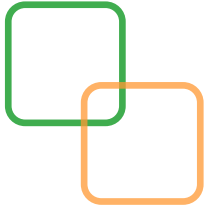
#### **Part 1: External Relaxation and Internal Tension**

- 1) Sit, stand, or lie down, and make your external muscles go totally limp, i.e. like a rag doll.
- 2) Now tense up your lower belly and your rectum.
- 3) Notice that you can still create and maintain internal tension, even though you look relaxed on the outside.

#### **Part 2: External Tension and Internal Relaxation**

- 1) Tense up your external muscles.
- 2) Now intentionally relax your lower belly and rectum.
- 3) Notice that even while you hold lots of external tension, you can still create and maintain internal relaxation.

Therefore, the goal is for the woman to focus on relaxing *inside*. The goal for the birth coach is to remind her to scan the inner space the baby is moving through and open it up.



## Unconscious Tension

You can hold unconscious tension without choosing to, and without even realizing that you are tense. There are lots of examples. Does one of your shoulders or hips sit higher than the other? That's probably due to unconscious tension. Do you grind your teeth at night? This is also unconscious tension. And many headaches are caused by unconscious tension in your internal blood vessels.

Nearly everyone today has much cause to feel stressed. Stress creates a lot of unconscious tension, because stress puts us into one of three states—fright, flight, or fight—which stimulate reaction. Reaction prepares your muscles to be ready to do something.

Think about your unconscious tension. Do you get a stiff neck? Is one of your arms limited in its ability to stretch? There are so many examples of unconscious tension. Often, we can see it in others, but our own may be hidden to us. Make a list of the kinds of unconscious tension you know or think you have, and share that list with your partner.

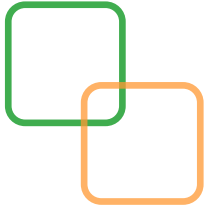
### *EXERCISE : TENSION THROUGHOUT THE DAY*

Periodically during the day, stop and identify where you are tense—e.g. gripping the steering wheel tightly, clenching your jaw, or tension from your habitual posture—and then relax that area. Pay particular attention to the area in your pelvis.

You already know that you can consciously tense up inside your belly and around your rectum and then relax. But what you need to know is that unconscious tension occurs just because humans move, which makes pelvic, leg, back, and buttock soft tissue tense up. If we didn't have tension in our body, we'd be oozing along the floor.

### *EXERCISE: THE PELVIC CLOCK*

- 1) Right now, visualize or pay attention to the inside of your pelvis.
- 2) Relax or soften inside of your pubic bone.
- 3) Soften inside your right hip.



- 4) Soften inside your sacrum, as well as your lower back.
- 5) Finally, soften inside your left hip.

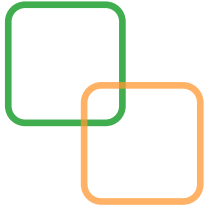
If you felt any softening or relaxation inside your body during this exercise, you've begun to harmonize yourself with the focal area of labor and birth: inside your pelvis. Going around and softening inside your pelvis is called The Pelvic Clock.

Soon, you'll be an expert. And you will certainly have a sense of mastery and greater confidence about the whole birth process. Unconscious tension must be acknowledged and worked with. As with conscious tension, **you must relax unconscious tension by choosing to do so.** Being able to reduce this type of tension is one of the greatest gifts you can give yourself when facing all sorts of stress, in addition to birthing your baby.

### **Structural Tension**

In all fairness, your structure isn't always about "tension." For example, you may have a long tailbone or narrow pubic arch. You can find out about these on the Birthing Better Pink Kit DVD. Each of us has a permanent shape to our bony structure. This shape is not created by "tension"; it is simply how your bony pelvis is shaped. Birth canal muscles (part of your soft tissue and not part of your bony structure) can also be tight. This is also a form of structural tension. Those muscles are how you are built.

Structural tension is not visible, but hidden, but it CAN be detected and softened. It is most easily resolved when worked with during pregnancy. You will learn how to do this in your Birthing Better Pink Kit DVD, on the audio CD called Internal Work, and in New Focus PDF. If either bony or soft tissue structural tension could hinder your baby's birthing process, it's best to know ahead of time and work on it. Our human body has a huge capacity for mobility.



### **Stretching Tension**

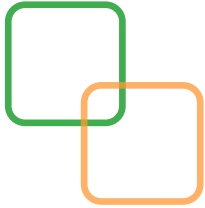
Here is the last type of tension. Stretching tension occurs when we push our soft tissues beyond what they are used to. For instance, if you were forced to do the splits, it would hurt because your ligaments and tendons were stretching (probably) beyond their norm.

During labor's 1<sup>st</sup> Stage, stretching tension is the cause of most of the pain associated with cervical dilation. The cervix is composed of 50% connective tissue cells and 50% muscle cells. It's closed during pregnancy. Contractions pull this tight "muscle" open, and that causes the pain because it has to stretch, which it is not used to.

"The Whys and Hows of Pain" resource explains how 1<sup>st</sup>-Stage back labor is due to a baby's pressing against the skeletal structure. However, this dreaded kind of pain is also caused when the sacrum is tight and/or the baby's head has a tight fit as it moves through the pelvic tube. The baby will then push the sacrum outward, trying to create more space. This stretches the ligaments, tendons, and connective tissue, with their embedded nerves, that run down the spine and into the sacrum, creating back labor tension.

During 2<sup>nd</sup> Stage, as the baby opens the birth canal, the stretching is felt locally in the vagina/birth canal and is known as "the ring of fire." Obviously, this part of a woman's body is not used to stretching so much. It takes about eight weeks of consistent work using The Internal Work skills to elasticize the soft tissue in the birth canal.

Furthermore, birthing women often unconsciously tense up their birth canal during 2<sup>nd</sup> Stage, because the big object coming down pushes on the rectum and causes a strong sensation of moving the bowels, which has so many social inhibitions when in the presence of others.



***EXERCISE: STRETCHING TENSION***

Try to do the splits, or sit with your legs spread out, and try to reach your ankles.

- Do you feel stretching pain? (Yes)
- Can you SEE this tension? (Not likely)
- Are you able to will it away? (No)

**Tension and Motion**

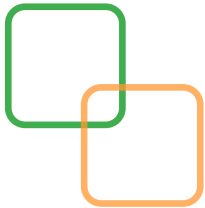
It's very important to note that all kinds of tension naturally occur whenever we change positions, from when we BEGIN to move as well as when we continue to move. This should produce an "Ah-ha" moment.

***EXERCISE: TENSION AND MOTION***

This exercise is important for both of you to experience and "feel," because the tension created inside our body when we move is only felt, not really seen. Most of us do not pay one bit of attention to any of it.

Once you get this, your teamwork will notch up in ability and communication. Remember: we all do the best we can with what we have, but when we know more, we do better. This is a huge bit of knowledge that will have incredibly positive spinoffs in whatever birth you have.

- 1) Sit comfortably and relax inside your belly, lower back, pelvis, buttocks, hamstrings, and knees.
- 2) Slowly stand up and notice how that simple action creates tension in those areas. Now soften and relax in each separate area again while standing.
- 3) Once you've relaxed all those areas, move one foot forward as if you were going to take a step. Notice that tension returns to all those areas once again. Soften in all those areas again.
- 4) At the end of each step, your baseline should be softened and relaxed so you can feel the difference and then absolutely know how to soften again in a new position.



This simple exercise clearly shows you two things:

- Softening/relaxing only one time is not the end of your work.
- You have to soften/relax whenever you move!

Yes, in this unique experience of giving birth, your skills are required at every moment. This goes for both of you!

**Women:** Giving birth is the ultimate in multi-tasking. Even though research shows that humans don't actually multi-task, but rather change their attention from doing one thing to another, in childbirth, women have the ability to pay attention nearly simultaneously to how they inhale, how open their pelvis is, which soft tissue to soften, the pain, and the sounds around them. Our senses during childbirth are heightened, our awareness multiplied.

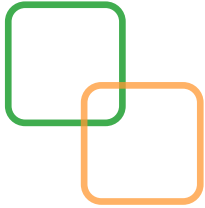
Luckily, scanning your body and softening very specific places gives you a strong focus for doing something rather than feeling out of control of an experience that seems uncontrollable. You cannot choose when the next contraction comes, but you *can* choose how you respond to each sensation.

**Men:** You will not know if the woman is intentionally softening or lost in the pain unless you have the skills of observation and listening, coupled with the best language, communication, and touch skills. These you'll learn. If you're impatient, skip to those modules now.

## Rethink Being “Toned”

Tighten up inside your crotch right now and ask yourself, does that tension hinder or help your baby come through your vagina? Yes, flexing your muscles is a form of tension. Women are often encouraged to do lots of pelvic floor exercises in pregnancy as a way to prepare for birth. As Pink Kit couples have learned, however, strength really isn't the right goal.





### **Learn to let go**

*A very “toned” woman had a Caesarean for her first birth. During their next pregnancy, she and her husband practiced the Pink Kit Method in order to have a vaginal birth. Her husband said: “In our first pregnancy, we thought that my wife had to have strong muscles in order to push our baby out. Instead, those strong muscles held our baby in.*

*“With the Pink Kit Method, we came to understand how important it is to create space for the baby. To do that, my wife had to learn to let go inside, in her soft tissue, rather than have toned muscles that created rigidity inside her. We did it, and it worked.”*

So, if you are doing pelvic floor exercises during pregnancy, stop around six months, and pick up again after the birth. Of course, you want to have a strong pelvic floor so you don't pee when you cough throughout your life, and pelvic floor exercises help that kind of problem considerably. But they are just NOT an exercise to prepare for giving birth when you need, at the right time, to open, soften, and let go. You won't automatically, innately, intuitively, or instinctively do that. You must learn how to.

No matter what the present message about childbirth is now, tensing up is your body and mind's normal behavior and default reaction to intense pain. And while you might take a hot water bottle to bed and curl up in a ball when you have painful menstrual cramps, that kind of coping mechanism is entirely inappropriate for labor. Birthing Better Pink Kit skills give you an entirely new approach to giving birth: learning how to be counter-intuitive for this unique type of pain.

Increasing painful labor contractions are good and indicate your baby's success in moving down, through, and out of your body. You want to learn to read this pain as productive, progressing, and purposeful. You want to meet this pain with skills. When you do this, you will feel empowered.

It makes sense that the way to overcome tension is not strength, but relaxation. Read on to the “Relaxation” resource to find out which Birthing Better Pink Kit skills will enable you to reduce your tension!