

## Fact Sheet

### Managing your labour

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There are many ways to help you labour; these include using relaxation, massage and positioning.

When you relax in labour it allows your body to focus on the process of birth. This helps your baby move down through your pelvis, your cervix (neck of the womb) to dilate (to open up) and helps keep the strength and frequency of contractions.

Every woman is different and you will know what is best for you in labour. We encourage you to communicate your preferences with your support person and midwife. You may find you like different things at different times in your labour.

Here are some suggestions to help you cope with your labour.

#### Relaxation Music

You may play your own music during labour. Westmead Birth Unit has a CD player in each birth room. You may also decide to bring your own docking station to play your music. Music can motivate you or keep you calm which helps you to control your birthing environment (space). It can make the environment feel more home-like and encourage you to relax.

Listening to music you enjoy, helps your brain release a hormone called Dopamine. This hormone is linked to your feelings around positive experiences. Music can also act as a distraction from discomfort.



*"I played my relaxation music while in labour, but when it came to pushing I played my old running playlist"-Michelle*

#### Massage

Massage can help reduce anxiety and encourage you to feel confident. Massage stimulates the production of hormones called endorphins. These hormones act as natural pain killers and mood enhancers.

In labour your support person can massage different areas including the shoulders, head, back, feet, legs and hands. Your partner or other support person can use long, flowing strokes, or large circular strokes.

For low back discomfort we suggest you are massaged with smaller movements and with firm pressure. Massage can help ease your muscle tension in labour and help you relax.



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### Heat

Heat packs placed on the lower abdomen (belly) or back can feel good. Your midwife at Westmead Hospital will make a heat pack for you. There is no need to bring your own. Applying heat can help you cope with the discomfort of contractions in labour.

### Water

Being in the water can be a very effective pain relief in labour. Water provides support and buoyancy that helps you to relax.

Lying in warm water during labour can reduce stress hormones and pain by helping your body to produce natural pain relievers (endorphins). It can ease muscular tension and help you to relax between contractions.

### Labouring in water may:

- provide significant pain relief
- reduce the need for drugs and interventions, particularly epidurals
- help you feel more in control in labour and happier about how you are coping
- provide a feeling of weightlessness, relieving tired muscles and stress
- speed up labour
- promote relaxation and conserve energy.



### Keeping active in labour is helpful

It is recommended you remain active in labour to help your baby move down through your pelvis.

- upright positioning allows gravity to encourage the baby into a position ready for birth, it can also put good pressure on your cervix (neck of the womb) to help it dilate (open)
- walk around the room or up and down corridors while you can
- lean on your partner or support person if it helps
- changing positions allows your body to help your baby descend (move down)

We have a variety of equipment available in our birth unit to help you. This includes bean bags, birth stools, baths, birthing mats and chairs. Our beds also move into many upright positions.

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We recommend you try:

- standing
- squatting
- rocking on your hands and knees
- sitting back to back with your support person.



Read more information on the active birth fact sheet

### Positive thinking

Positive thinking is important in labour as it helps you to feel confident. Your midwife and support people will help inspire you to feel strong and capable.

**Some women like to focus on word or a positive message. An example of this is "Down and Out", "My Body and baby are working together", "I am strong and confident".**

Women in labour need to feel safe, supported and secure. This encourages a positive experience as well as helps your body supply good levels of labour hormone.

**We welcome further feedback on this brochure as a way of continually improving our service.**

**Send your feedback to:**

WSLHD-Get\_Involved@health.nsw.gov.au