



Complementary therapies for pain in labour

Labour involves uterine contractions & dilatation of the cervix (neck of the uterus) followed by the birth of your baby and is – as the word suggests – hard work. It's usually painful due to muscle contractions & nerve stimulation but this is affected by anxiety, fear & the progress of your labour. Don't feel a failure if you need pain relief – trying to “soldier on“ with unbearable pain can sometimes lead to complications.

Be prepared - keep fit & healthy in pregnancy & ask your midwife to explain anything you don't understand. Stay at home as long as possible in early labour. Keep upright & mobile & try various positions – standing, sitting, leaning over a chair, on all fours, or use a birthing ball. Avoid lying flat as this may slow labour down & affect your baby's heart rate. Try distraction – watch TV, read, listen to music, play board games or use hypnosis tapes. Stay cool – use a fan, wear an old T-shirt & keep paper knickers ready for when your waters break. You may need socks in case your feet feel cold. Sip water to prevent dehydration & nibble small snacks of toast, cereal or porridge. A useful breathing technique during contractions is to Sigh Out Slowly (SOS) - focus on breathing out with a big “sigh of relief “. Have a warm bath but don't use aromatherapy oils if your waters have broken. Hire a TENS machine & use it from early labour to give it time to work properly.

Massage with aromatherapy oils eg lavender, clary sage & jasmine may ease pain, relax you & aid contractions. Use 4 drops in total, blended in 5 ml of carrier oil & ask your partner to massage it into your back, shoulders or tummy, or put in a bowl of water to soak your feet. *Don't continuously* burn oils or use a vaporiser, as you may become drowsy & nauseous. You can also stimulate acupuncture points during contractions by asking your partner to press intermittently with his two thumbs in the dimples either side of your spine in the small of your back. Bach flower remedies may ease nerves (Rescue remedy, 4 drops) or tiredness (olive, 2 drops). It's also good for your partner especially if he panics at the first sign of your labour! Raspberry leaf tea, to drink or sucked as ice cubes, can help contractions but don't take this if you need a drip to speed up labour. Homeopathic remedies should be prescribed for your precise symptoms – it's possible to buy packs with instructions to help you choose the most appropriate remedy. Examples include chamomilla if you “can't bear it any more”, caulophyllum if your contractions are short, irregular & flying in all directions, or pulsatilla if your contractions & your mood are changeable – but, remember - things change quickly during labour so consult a qualified homeopath for best advice. If you want to have a private therapist, eg acupuncturist, homeopath or reflexologist, with you during labour discuss this with your midwife well in advance.

Always inform your midwife if you're using natural remedies or complementary therapies in labour, especially if you need an induction or a drip to speed up contractions.