



Amanda Harry^{MSW, RSW}
Psychotherapy and Consulting

amandaharry.com

The Calm, Confident Birth Toolbox

You can't stop the waves but you can learn to surf!

THE STRONG MIND

This is a selection of tools to support women to respond to sensations during pregnancy and labour. You may find that some of the tools work better for you at different stages. You may also find that you are more comfortable using some tools over others. To get the greatest benefit, practice using these tools regularly at least throughout the final trimester.

BREATH AS AN ANCHOR

Focus on your breathing, bringing your whole attention to your in breath and your out breath, counting each breath during your surges to help you maintain your concentration and also as a way of reminding yourself that the sensations you feel during surges only last for a certain number of breaths. Take long, deep, slow breaths to support you to relax and recover between surges.

The body follows where the mind leads.

Focus on being calm, confident and comfortable.



UP-BREATHING

UP-Breathing is useful during surges in the first stage (UP STAGE) of labour.

Why do we call it "up breathing"? Because the muscles are drawing up, as the walls of the uterus thin and the cervix opens.

It is a simple, long, slow breath in through the nose and out through the mouth.

The purpose of UP-Breathing is to use the absolute minimum muscular effort, so that the muscles used in breathing in no way inhibit the working of the uterine muscles.

This breath slows the heart rate down, and supports relaxation.

We breathe in through the nose as its our natural way of breathing, and out through the mouth because it gives us a feeling of release/letting go.

The out breath is naturally a little longer than the in breath, and it's during the out breath that we produce more oxytocin. Oxytocin will help your body work efficiently and support you to feel calm and comfortable throughout labour.

A few slow, deep breaths can help you feel more relaxed. By focusing on our breath, we are mindfully letting go of anything else that may be trying to hold our attention.

We know that in the first stage of labour the uterine muscles are working to draw up and we know that the mind is powerful and affects the body. As the body is working upwards, we want the mind thinking “up” so the mind and body can work together.

UP-BREATHING VISUALIZATIONS

Whilst taking a long, slow breath in through the nose and out through the mouth, focus your attention upwards. Keep it simple, you may want to focus on one image and just repeat it over and over.



Breathe IN

Watch the sun rise, the beautiful pink light appearing on the horizon. As the sun rises, your body draws gently upwards.

Breathe OUT

As the sun rises higher in the sky, see the light reflected on the clouds above.



Breathe IN

See yourself blowing bubbles, see them getting bigger and bigger.

Breathe OUT

Watch the bubbles float upwards into the sky, higher and higher, with each relaxing breath.



Breathe IN

Imagine yourself beside a huge, brightly coloured hot air balloon as it gets bigger and bigger.

Breathe OUT

Watch the balloon floating up and up into the sky until it's tiny, high in the sky.



Breathe IN

Feeling calm, and comfortable, know that your mind and body are working together.

Breathe OUT

Continuing to relax and let go.

DOWN-BREATHING

Useful in the second stage, (DOWN STAGE/very active stage) once the cervix is fully opened, as the baby moves down the birth canal into the world. Muscles are pushing down and you are birthing your baby

Nice breath in through nose, and longer out through nose—much more focused breathing, send breath down through body.

You will feel baby's head pushing down. When you feel the pushing sensation you will use this breath as long as the pushing feeling lasts then will feel the head come up again. Baby's head will do this repeatedly, as it is gradually stretching out the vagina until it stretches enough for baby to crown and then come out.

A good place to practice this is on the toilet—every time you go for a poo, practice down breathing. When you tense, you feel everything drawing up. You want to resist tensing and keep everything relaxed and moving down.

DOWN-BREATHING VISUALIZATIONS

This is a short, quick breath in through the nose, and a longer breath out through the nose, focusing your attention downwards.

An image of anything that is down, soft and open can be helpful.



Watch the ripples flowing out and out on a pond, becoming smoother and smoother.



See a big, beautiful, soft flower open, each petal growing and unveiling another.



Imagine a stream, with the water flowing into a beautiful waterfall.

BABY VISUALIZATION

Conjuring up an image of your baby during labour may help you remember what these powerful sensations in your body are all about! They're helping you to bring your baby out of your body and into your arms.

Practice allowing an image of a baby to arise in your mind's eye. Imagine the softness and smell of the baby's skin and the warmth and weight of the baby as you hold him or her close to you.

See the colour and texture of the baby's hair and the tiny fingers and toes. Do this with a little smile, to help the oxytocin flow!



ANCHORING WORDS

Using words to increase calm, concentration and ease—may be most helpful in rest phase/in between surges.

Like a mantra, words can be repeated silently to oneself in rhythm with the breath, as a way to focus the mind and evoke certain feelings. Breath IN on the first word, OUT on the second.

Below are some examples, or play with creating your own:

In, Out
Light, Slow
Calm, Ease
Relax, Release
Let, Go

SOUNDING

Sounding is an ancient way of sustaining concentration in the present moment.

When the mouth is relaxed, jaw soft and throat open, it contributes to relaxation and sense of wellbeing. There is a neuromuscular connection between throat and birth canal, so when there is a tightening of the throat there is a tightening of the birth canal. This connection is between the jaw, pelvis, mouth and cervix so keep the mouth and jaw relaxed even when the body is challenged.

Low, sexy moans are good! On your outbreath try:

Ahhhhh Ohhhhh Aum Moo

Experiment with having your partner sound with you, following the lead of your breathing, letting partner's sounding be slightly lower and softer. Perhaps sitting close, putting your head on partner's chest...reminding you that although you are the one birthing your baby, you are not alone.



TOUCH

Touch is another way to get oxytocin flowing to support the feeling of comfort and security. There are many way to use the power of touch:

Holding a hand

Holding the head: Ask your partner to place one hand on your forehead and the other at the base of your head, where your skull meets your neck. Their hands should be relaxed as they mold to the shape of your head, yet the pressure be firm enough so you can totally let go whilst your head is supported.

Connecting with the heart: Ask your partner to place one hand on your breastbone and the other hand on your back, between your shoulder blades. Let their hands make full contact with your body.

Awareness of breath: Ask your partner to place one hand just below your belly button and the other at the lower back..

Holding the feet: If you are labouring in bed, holding your feet during a surge/expansion may feel very grounding.

Stroking: Our nervous system experiences downward strokes as relaxing, upward is energizing. Experiment with having your partner stroke one part of your body ie. Head, arm, legs, spine or anywhere that you find comforting. Have your partner coordinate the down stroke with your out breath. When you breathe in, their hand is at rest.



Counter pressure: Steady, strong force applied to one spot on the lower back during contractions using the heel of the hand, or pressure on the side of each hip using both hands. Counter-pressure helps alleviate back pain during labour, especially in women experiencing "back labour."

Whatever feels good for you! You will need to experiment with firmness, giving your partner feedback about what feels right. You are likely to need something different at different stages. Or you may not want any touch! Ask your birth partner to offer touch, check what feels right and listen to what you might need.



BODY SCAN

Starting with your feet, take time to check in with each part of your body, noticing any sensations and being aware of any areas of tension. With each out breath, let your body relax.

Stay in the Present Moment



When a woman in labour feels out of control, what is often happening is that she is getting lost in her reactions to pain or fear and is very far from the present moment.

The birth partner's role is to bring her back to the present moment, and keep her there! Practice using touch, focused eye contact and sounding on the out breath with your birth partner as this can be key to feeling supported and finding your way back to a sense of calm.

For birth preparation, birth story processing and support as you transition into parenthood visit amandaharry.com to book your free 15 minute consultation.

Covered by many extended health benefit plans!



Amanda Harry MSW, RSW
Psychotherapy and Consulting
Nurturing resilience with compassion

Direct 289.439.7625
Email info@amandaharry.com
Web amandaharry.com