

Comfort Measures
FOR LABOR

THE BON BÉBÉ DOULA
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It's normal to feel excited, jittery, or full of adrenalin when labor finally begins. You've been waiting for this moment for months! You may be feeling hyper-aware of everything that your body is experiencing- every cramp, contraction, or sensation may cause you to wonder, "What was that feeling? Is this it? Should we go to the hospital? Is it finally time?!"

However, one of the crucial aspects to understand about labor is the importance of ignoring it for as long as feasible. This might sound counterintuitive, but actively engaging or fixating on the onset of early labor symptoms can very often lead to increased stress, anxiety, and impatience- the very emotions and hormones that can actually slow your labor down! It's a bit of a "watched pot that never boils" kind of situation. The more you focus on labor, the longer it will seem (and as a result, the more frustrated and exhausted you'll feel!).

As you explore this guide, remember to grant yourself permission to explore and embrace a variety of coping strategies. Every labor is unique, and what works wonders for one may differ for another. Try it ALL - from massage and music to mantras and laughter, each technique contributes to the rich tapestry of possibilities for a positive birth experience. Once a coping strategy loses its efficacy, be open to trying something new!

Lastly, maintain perspective - you're just having a baby, after all! Amidst the myriad of coping techniques, remember the profound joy and beauty of the impending arrival. Embrace each technique, trust in your ability to adapt, and prepare to welcome your little one with love and strength.

A

Acupressure

Hip squeezes, palm pressure , head massage, sacral releases, and pressure points on ankles/feet can help.

Affirmations

Create a list of words, phrases, or thoughts that feel meaningful or that may help you during labor (For example, "I am strong and capable" or "I can do hard things"). Print them on special paper, write them on your birth ball, or ask your partner to write them in their handwriting for you to read and focus on during contractions.

Ambiance

Do you feel calm and safe in your space? Early labor is a good time to do light cleaning or tidying, adjust the lighting or music to your preferences, and preparing your space.

Attitude

Your attitude during this phase of labor can set the stage for the rest of your labor! Practice surrendering to the sensations and emotions you are feeling. Thoughts like, "I am welcoming my baby!" or "Every contraction is a gift that is helping me meet my baby" can help. Remind yourself to smile, feel gratitude, and relax.

Avoid the Fear/Tension/Pain Cycle

Remember: labor is not an emergency! There is no need to rush, feel stressed, or worry. There is nothing to "do" during this stage other than to allow things happen in their own time.

Bake

Baking during early labor is a tradition that dates back hundreds of years! A baking project during early labor is a great way to stay distracted, and you'll have a yummy treat to look forward to later on when your baby arrives.

Bath and shower

Drawing a warm bath during early labor can provide both physical and emotional relief. The soothing effect of warm water can ease tension and promote relaxation, contributing to a more comfortable labor experience.

Birth ball

Sitting or rocking on the ball can relieve pressure on the lower back and pelvis, promoting comfort and optimal fetal positioning. Additionally, gentle bouncing or circular movements on the ball may help ease contractions and provide a sense of control during labor.

Breathing exercises

Slow, rhythmic breathing helps to promote relaxation and manage discomfort. Practicing deep belly breathing or patterned breathing exercises can be effective strategies for labor.

Belly lifts

This simple exercise involves the birthing person or their partner applying upward pressure to the abdomen during contractions, providing additional support and promoting comfort. This technique can be practiced in various positions, allowing flexibility based on the laboring person's preferences.

Aromatherapy

Scent is a powerful tool in relaxation. Familiar smells from home or a diffuser with your favorite scents can help you feel calm and at ease.

B



C

Changing positions
Change positions frequently to help encourage labor progress, facilitate baby's descent, and to stay comfortable. Swaying, rocking, or kneeling can alleviate pressure and encourage labor. Stay attuned to your body's cues and find experiment with positions every 20-40 minutes to keep things flowing.

Cold
Cold therapy, involving the application of ice packs or cold cloths, can be a refreshing and effective comfort measure during early labor. The cooling sensation provides relief from the intensity of contractions, helping to manage discomfort.

Counter pressure
Teach partners or support persons how to apply firm pressure to the lower back or hips, addressing discomfort associated with early labor. This hands-on approach can be particularly effective in easing tension and enhancing the birthing person's overall comfort.

Curb walking
Curb walking is a simple yet beneficial technique to encourage progress in labor. Walking with one foot on a an elevated curb such as a sidewalk, with the other foot on the ground, can aid in optimal positioning and stimulate contractions. Plus, getting fresh air will almost always help to relax you (which also helps labor progress!).

D

Dancing
Get into the rhythm of early labor by putting on your favorite music and swaying gently to the beat. Dancing can be a joyful way to distract yourself from contractions and connect with your body, making the early stages more enjoyable.

Dark chocolate
Indulge in a bit of dark chocolate to treat yourself during early labor. The mood-boosting properties of dark chocolate can bring a sense of pleasure and comfort, making your initial labor stage a bit sweeter.

Darkness
Creating a dim and cozy environment by dimming the lights or using soft candles can enhance relaxation during early labor. Darkness promotes the release of melatonin, a hormone that supports a calming atmosphere.



Decline cervical exams

Consider opting for fewer cervical exams during early labor. Overexamination can sometimes lead to increased stress and anxiety. Trust your body's signals and only agree to exams when necessary. This can help you maintain a more intuitive and less intrusive experience as you progress through the initial stages of labor.

Distraction

Introducing distractions, such as favorite movies, TV shows, or engaging conversations, can divert attention from the intensity of contractions. Prepare a playlist of your favorite tunes or have engaging shows lined up for a distraction during contractions. Introducing enjoyable distractions can shift your focus and make early labor a more mentally positive experience.

Doula support

Doulas are experienced in providing comfort, guidance, and reassurance, making the early stages more manageable for both you and your partner. Doula support can help you stay calm, focused, and relaxed.

E

Eat and drink

Nourishing your body with light snacks and staying hydrated is essential during early labor. Keep energy levels up by opting for easily digestible snacks and refreshing drinks. This practice ensures you remain fueled for the journey ahead.

Effleurage

Gentle massage techniques, like effleurage, can offer comforting touch during early labor. Encourage your birth partner or doula to use long, soothing strokes on your back or shoulders to ease tension and promote relaxation.

Epidural

Consider discussing pain relief options, including epidurals, with your healthcare provider. Understanding the choices available empowers you to make informed decisions about your labor experience. Keep an open line of communication to address any concerns or questions you may have about epidural use.

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Eyes closed

Closing your eyes during contractions can help you turn inward, enhancing your ability to focus and find a rhythm. By shutting out external stimuli, you create a personal, tranquil space that aids in relaxation and concentration.

Exercise

Incorporating gentle exercises, like walking or prenatal yoga, can promote comfort and flexibility during early labor. Movement encourages the baby to descend into the pelvis and can alleviate discomfort.

F

Faith

Drawing on your faith or spirituality during labor can provide emotional strength and a sense of connection to something greater. Consider incorporating prayers, affirmations, or rituals that hold personal significance to help navigate the challenges of labor.

Focal points

Choosing a focal point, such as a cherished object or a visual anchor in the birthing room, can help distract from pain and provide a positive focus during contractions. Whether it's a picture, ultrasound copy, a comforting item, or a spot in the room, having a designated focal point can enhance your mental resilience.

Foot massage

A soothing foot massage can be a wonderful way to release tension and promote relaxation. Ask your birth partner or doula to gently massage your feet, focusing on pressure points that may provide comfort during contractions.

Fresh air

Venturing outside or simply opening a window for fresh air can invigorate your senses and create a rejuvenating atmosphere. Taking deep breaths of fresh air during contractions may contribute to a sense of clarity and calmness.

G

Gratitude

Cultivating a mindset of gratitude during labor can shift your focus and promote positivity. Consider expressing gratitude for the strength of your body, the support around you, and the upcoming arrival of your baby. This practice can create a sense of empowerment and resilience.

Grounding

Practicing grounding techniques, such as feeling the support of the floor beneath you or connecting with the earth, can help anchor your energy. This sense of stability may provide comfort and a centered feeling amidst the intensity of contractions.

Gravity

Leveraging gravity by changing positions and incorporating movement can aid in the progression of labor. Swaying, rocking, or using a birthing ball can harness the force of gravity to help your baby descend through the birth canal, potentially making contractions more effective.

Guided meditation

Guided meditation, either through pre-recorded sessions or with the assistance of a doula, can provide a calming anchor during labor. Focusing on soothing imagery, breathing exercises, and positive affirmations can contribute to a serene mental state.

Gum or mints

Chewing gum or sucking on mints can offer a refreshing distraction during labor. The act of chewing or tasting something can stimulate the senses, providing a small but effective way to shift your attention and find moments of relief.



H

Hands and knees
The hands and knees position can be a comfortable and effective way to relieve pressure during contractions. It opens up the pelvis and encourages optimal fetal positioning, potentially easing discomfort and aiding the progress of labor.

Hand on chest
Placing a hand on your chest, particularly over your heart, can serve as a grounding self-touch technique. This simple gesture can help you stay connected with your body and focus on your heartbeat, keeping you calm.

Heat
Applying heat, whether through warm compresses, a heating pad, or a warm bath, can provide soothing relief during labor. Heat can help relax tense muscles and ease the intensity of contractions.

Horse lips
Horse lips, a playful and rhythmic blowing technique, can help release tension in the face and jaw. This technique encourages relaxation and can be a lighthearted way to navigate through contractions.

Holding hands
The simple act of holding hands with a supportive partner, friend, or doula can provide reassurance and connection. Physical touch can be a powerful source of comfort and encouragement throughout the labor process.



Hypnosis
Exploring hypnosis techniques can assist in managing pain and promoting relaxation during labor. This approach involves entering a state of focused concentration, potentially altering your perception of discomfort.

Hydration
Staying hydrated is crucial during labor to maintain energy levels and support overall well-being. Sipping on water or electrolyte drinks can prevent dehydration and contribute to a more comfortable and sustained labor experience.

I

Ignore, ignore, ignore!

Ignoring early labor can be a game-changer. By focusing on distracting activities and keeping the mind occupied, you can help ease anxiety and promote relaxation during this potentially lengthy stage.

Imagery

Visualization and guided imagery can be powerful tools during early labor. Encourage the use of mental imagery, where the laboring person envisions serene scenes or positive outcomes.

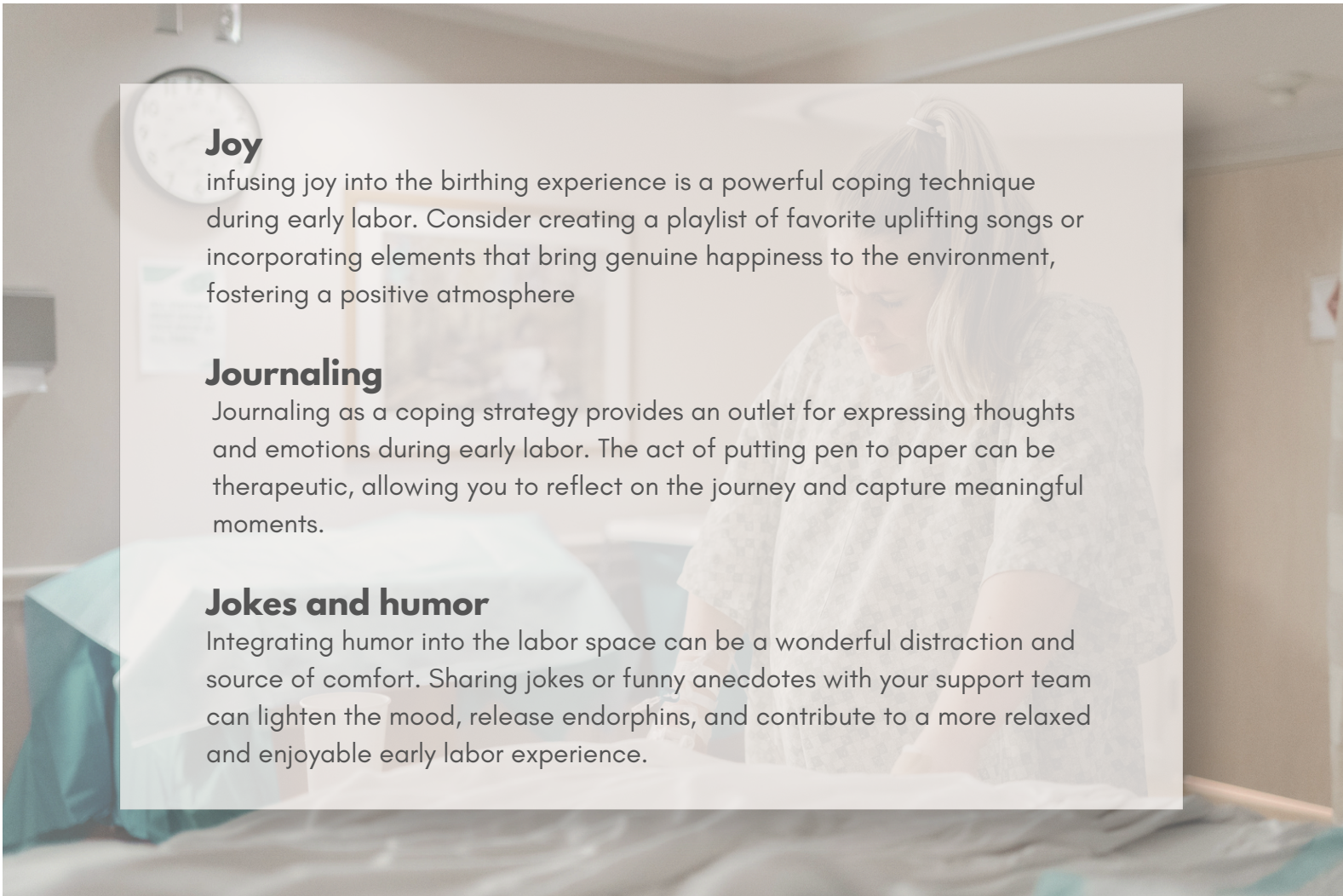
Intimate conversation

Conversations with your birth partner or support team can provide a welcome distraction during early labor. Sharing thoughts, feelings, or even reminiscing about shared experiences can help create a positive and connected atmosphere.

Incline positions

Exploring different incline positions, such as hands and knees, can help create comfort and optimal fetal positioning. These positions can alleviate pressure on the lower back and encourage the baby's descent.

J



Joy

infusing joy into the birthing experience is a powerful coping technique during early labor. Consider creating a playlist of favorite uplifting songs or incorporating elements that bring genuine happiness to the environment, fostering a positive atmosphere

Journaling

Journaling as a coping strategy provides an outlet for expressing thoughts and emotions during early labor. The act of putting pen to paper can be therapeutic, allowing you to reflect on the journey and capture meaningful moments.

Jokes and humor

Integrating humor into the labor space can be a wonderful distraction and source of comfort. Sharing jokes or funny anecdotes with your support team can lighten the mood, release endorphins, and contribute to a more relaxed and enjoyable early labor experience.

K

Keep mobile and active

Mobility and activity is a key strategy for coping with early labor. Movement, whether through walking, swaying, or gentle exercises, can enhance comfort.

Kinesthetic distraction

Incorporate movement and tactile activities to divert attention during early labor. Simple exercises or rhythmic movements can provide a positive focus.

Kissing

Engaging in kissing during early labor can release oxytocin, the love hormone, providing emotional support and comfort. It fosters a connection between partners and adds an intimate touch to the birthing experience.

Kneeling

Exploring different positions, such as kneeling, can offer relief during early labor. Kneeling allows for flexibility and movement, promoting comfort.

L

Laughter

Infusing humor and laughter into early labor can be a natural stress reliever. It triggers the release of endorphins, providing a positive and uplifting atmosphere during the initial stages of labor.

Loose muscles

Consciously focusing on keeping muscles relaxed, particularly in the shoulders, neck, and jaw, can alleviate tension during early labor. Promoting overall muscle looseness encourages a more comfortable and manageable experience.

Lotion and oils

Applying soothing lotions or oils during early labor provides a tactile and comforting sensation. Gentle massages with these substances can ease tension and enhance relaxation.

Love

Expressing and receiving love from birthing partners or support persons creates a reassuring environment. Emotional connection and love contribute to a sense of security and comfort.



M

N

Mantras

Repeating affirming mantras or phrases can be a centering practice during early labor. Positive affirmations, tailored to the individual's preferences, offer mental and emotional support, fostering a resilient mindset for the birthing process.

Massage

Gentle and targeted massage during early labor can provide profound relief. Physical touch can also release endorphins, the body's natural painkillers. Focusing on areas of tension, such as the lower back or shoulders, helps promote relaxation and can significantly ease discomfort.

Music

Curating a playlist of favorite, calming, or uplifting songs can be a powerful coping strategy. Music has the ability to influence mood, distract from discomfort, and create a positive atmosphere during the early stages of labor.

Narcotics

In some cases, medical pain relief through narcotics may be an option. Discussing this with your healthcare provider allows you to make an informed decision based on your comfort level and birth preferences.

Nature

Connecting with nature, even briefly, can have a calming effect. Taking a short walk outside, breathing in fresh air, or simply gazing at greenery can provide a welcome distraction and contribute to a serene early labor experience.

No numbers
Avoiding fixation on numerical aspects like dilation or contraction frequency can reduce stress and anxiety. Focusing on the qualitative aspects of your labor experience, such as comfort measures and emotional support, promotes a more positive mindset.

Nourishment
Maintaining energy is crucial during early labor. Consuming light, easily digestible snacks and staying hydrated helps sustain stamina. Consider options like fruit, yogurt, or clear broths to keep nourished without overwhelming your system.

O

“Oooo” sounds
Vocalization, including soothing "ooo" sounds, can be a helpful coping mechanism during early labor. These sounds may assist in releasing tension, allowing for relaxation and a more comfortable experience.

Open communication with birth team
Establishing open communication with your care team is crucial. Clearly expressing your preferences, concerns, and questions ensures that everyone is on the same page, creating a supportive and informed environment for your early labor experience.

Orgasm
For some individuals, the release of endorphins during an orgasm can contribute to pain relief and relaxation. The oxytocin release can also help to strengthen and encourage contractions.

P

Palm presses
Gentle palm presses on specific pressure points can provide comfort and relaxation during early labor. Communicate with your support team to identify the areas where palm presses are most effective for your comfort.

Partner’s presence
Having your partner present and actively engaged provides emotional support during early labor. Their presence can be a source of comfort and connection as you navigate this stage together.

Peace
Creating a peaceful environment is essential for managing early labor. Whether it's through calming music, dim lighting, or simply finding a mental space of tranquility, cultivating peace can positively influence your overall experience.

Peanut ball
Utilizing a peanut ball between your legs while lying on your side can aid in opening the pelvis and encouraging optimal fetal positioning, potentially enhancing early labor progress and comfort.

Peppermint

Incorporating the scent of peppermint, through essential oils or other methods, may help alleviate nausea during early labor. Discuss this option with your care team and consider having peppermint-infused items on hand.

Positive language

Encourage positive and affirming language throughout early labor. Using affirmations and positive statements can contribute to a mindset of strength and empowerment during this initial stage.

Pillows

Strategic placement of pillows for support and comfort can make a significant difference during early labor. Experiment with various positions and pillow arrangements to find what feels best for you.

Privacy

Ensuring a sense of privacy can promote relaxation and minimize stress during early labor. Communicate your preferences for personal space and privacy with your support team to create a comfortable environment.

Q



Questions

It can be difficult to remember to ask questions when you're in labor. Having a list of prepared questions for your healthcare provider ensures that you stay informed and engaged during early labor. It also makes sure that you don't miss important information for decision-making. Questions about the progression of labor, potential interventions, and your preferences can foster open communication and help you make informed decisions. Consider discussing these questions with your doula to ensure you're well-prepared. During labor, your partner can help you remember questions (or ask them on your behalf).

Quiet

Embracing moments of quiet and stillness during early labor allows you to connect with your inner self, as well as keep you and your birth space feeling calm. Request calm, quiet voices around you and have your partner help you find moments to be alone if you feel you need it.

R

Reassurance
In the midst of early labor, reassurance from your support team can make a significant difference. You may find you need much more reassurance than you expect! Positive affirmations, gentle touch, and words of encouragement can create a calming atmosphere, helping you navigate the initial stage with confidence.

Rebozo
Using a rebozo, a traditional Mexican shawl, during early labor provides both physical and emotional support. Gentle movements and wraps can alleviate tension, while the rhythmic motions contribute to a soothing environment. Explore various techniques with your doula to see how the rebozo can enhance your comfort.

Relaxation
Prioritize relaxation techniques during early labor to ease tension and promote a more comfortable experience. Deep breathing, visualization, and progressive muscle relaxation are effective methods. Collaborate with your doula to find the relaxation strategy that aligns best with your preferences.

Respect
Maintaining a sense of respect for your body's process is crucial. Acknowledge the natural rhythm of contractions and changes, trusting that your body knows how to progress. Creating a respectful environment, both within yourself and with your support team, fosters a positive mindset.

Rhythm and ritual
Establishing a comforting rhythm or ritual during early labor can offer stability. Whether it's swaying gently, listening to a favorite playlist, or engaging in repetitive motions, finding your unique rhythm can create a calming effect. Discuss these preferences with your doula to integrate them seamlessly into your early labor experience.

Rice socks
A simple yet effective comfort measure, rice socks can provide warmth and soothing pressure during contractions. Warm up the sock in a microwave and apply it to areas of tension, like the lower back or shoulders. The combination of heat and weight offers a comforting sensation, contributing to your overall relaxation.

Rocking
Gentle rocking movements can be incredibly calming during early labor. Whether it's swaying side to side, rocking back and forth on a birthing ball, or finding a rhythm that suits you, this technique helps alleviate discomfort and promotes a sense of ease. Work with your doula to explore rocking movements that resonate with your body.

S

Safety

Feeling safe and secure is paramount during labor. Minimize external disturbances, create a quiet space, and communicate your need for privacy. Feeling observed or startled can trigger the fight-or-flight response, hindering the natural progression of labor.



Self care techniques

Incorporate self-care techniques into your early labor routine. These moments of self-nurturing can have a profound impact on your emotional well-being during this stage.

Shoulders down

Encouraging the release of tension in your shoulders can promote relaxation throughout your entire body. Letting your shoulders drop and consciously releasing any tightness can contribute to a more comfortable experience.

Side lying

Lying on your side can be a beneficial position during early labor. It allows for optimal blood flow, and it's a comfortable alternative for rest between contractions. Collaborate with your doula to explore the advantages of side-lying positions that align with your preferences.

Slow dancing

Engaging in slow, rhythmic movements, like slow dancing with your partner, can bring comfort and emotional support during early labor. This technique promotes relaxation and helps distract from the intensity of contractions.

Spinning babies

Exploring Spinning Babies techniques with your doula can assist in optimizing fetal positioning. These exercises focus on balance, posture, and movement to encourage your baby into an ideal position for birth, potentially easing the progression of early labor.

Squatting

Squatting is a natural and effective position for early labor. It encourages the baby to descend into the pelvis, facilitating dilation.

Sterile water injections

Sterile water injections can be a helpful option for pain relief during early labor. Small injections just beneath the skin can create a counterirritation, distracting from the intensity of contractions.

Supportive team

Building a supportive team is essential for labor. Communicate openly with your doula, partner, and healthcare providers about your needs and preferences. A cohesive and understanding support team enhances your emotional well-being and contributes to a positive early labor experience.



T

Talk to your baby

Engaging in verbal communication with your baby during early labor can establish a powerful connection. Sharing positive affirmations, expressing your love, and envisioning the birthing process with your little one can create a soothing atmosphere, contributing to a positive early labor experience.

TENs unit

Consider utilizing a TENS (Transcutaneous Electrical Nerve Stimulation) unit during early labor for pain relief. This non-invasive device delivers mild electrical impulses to nerve endings, potentially reducing the perception of pain. Collaborate with your doula and care provider to explore whether a TENS unit aligns with your comfort and preferences.

Time-out

Taking moments for yourself, whether in solitude or with your supportive partner, can be crucial during early labor. A short time-out allows you to regroup, focus on your breathing, and mentally prepare for the next contraction. Communicate your need for brief periods of privacy to your doula for personalized support.

Toilet

Sitting on the toilet can be a comfortable and relieving position during early labor. The upright posture and gentle pressure can support the descent of the baby into the pelvis. In addition, it's easier for your body to relax and loosen the appropriate muscles when sitting on the toilet.

Touch

Physical touch, encompassing a range of comforting gestures, plays a significant role in early labor. Holding hands, receiving back rubs, or embracing your partner can offer a sense of security and ease. Collaborate with your team to explore personalized physical touch techniques that enhance your comfort and emotional well-being.

Tug-of-war

Incorporating a gentle tug of war with a bedsheet or rebozo into labor adds a dynamic element. This technique involves holding onto one end of the sheet or rebozo while your doula or birth partner gently pulls the other end. The rhythmic back-and-forth motion can offer both distraction and a sense of grounded support, providing comfort during contractions.

V

Variety

Embracing variety in your coping strategies during early labor allows you to adapt to changing sensations. Experiment with different techniques, such as movement, breathing exercises, and focal points, to discover what brings you the most comfort and relief.



Visualization

Harnessing the power of visualization can create a calming mental space during early labor. Work with your doula to explore imagery that brings you peace and focus. Envisioning a serene scene, such as a tranquil beach or a favorite place, can serve as a valuable tool to center your mind and navigate the intensity of contractions.

Vocalization

Vocalizations can be a powerful coping mechanism during labor. Whether it's low moans, rhythmic humming, or vocalizing specific affirmations, using your voice can help release tension and connect with the rhythm of contractions. Remember to use low sounds that keep your mouth and jaw open. High-pitched sounds can cause you to retain tension in your jaw, neck, and shoulders, which can increase your stress and pain.

W

Walking
Taking a gentle stroll during labor encourages movement, helping to ease discomfort, give you a much-needed change of scenery, and stimulate the progression of contractions.

Water
Immersing yourself in warm water, whether in a bath or under the soothing flow of a shower, can be a highly effective coping strategy. Water provides buoyancy, alleviating pressure on your body and promoting relaxation.



X, Y, Z

eXhalation techniques
Mastering intentional and controlled exhalation can be a powerful tool during early labor. Work with your doula to practice various exhalation techniques, such as slow, rhythmic breathing or guided breathwork, to help you stay focused, calm, and in tune with your body's natural rhythms.

Yoga
Incorporating gentle yoga poses tailored for early labor can enhance your comfort and relaxation. Collaborate with your doula to explore suitable yoga practices that align with your preferences and consider creating a yoga-inspired routine to ease through the initial stages of labor.

Yield to contractions
Learning to yield to contractions rather than resisting them can significantly reduce tension and discomfort. Learn about the concept of yielding to contractions, exploring techniques to surrender to the natural process and work with your body.

Zoning out
Allowing yourself to enter a focused and calm mental state, akin to zoning out, can be beneficial during early labor. Explore mindfulness and relaxation techniques that facilitate this mental state, helping you navigate the initial stages of labor with a centered and composed mindset.