



Northumbria Healthcare
NHS Foundation Trust

Relaxation for Pregnancy and Labour

Issued by the Physiotherapy Department

This leaflet provides information about The Mitchell Method of Relaxation and how it can be used during pregnancy and labour.

The benefits of learning a simple relaxation technique can put you in control of your reactions to stressful situations and also relieve unhelpful muscle tension.

The risk of uncontrolled tension is that it can waste energy, restrict circulation, increase pain and often lead to more stress.

Relaxation can be combined with alternative ways of coping with stress, such as focused breathing and distraction, and may reduce reliance on pain medication. Physiotherapists will teach you the techniques at antenatal classes. Ask your community midwife about classes in your area.

Tension

A common response of the body to stressful situations is to tense up. A typical and often habitual pattern of muscle tension results. The head is forward, jaws clench, teeth grind, lips are tight and the tongue cleaves to the roof of the mouth. The shoulders lift towards the ears, arms are held into the body with the elbows bent. Hands clench and the body is held rigid and hunched forward. Breathing is rapid and shallow or is held on an inward breath. The legs cross or are squeezed together with the foot held rigid or moved up and down.

The Mitchell method of relaxation

With practice we can learn how to change positions of tension to those of ease.

Tense muscles automatically relax when we get the opposite muscles of a joint to work. If the working muscles are then told to 'stop' relaxation occurs in both groups of muscles.

It is important to think about what is happening and 'feel' the position of ease.

The brain is trained to recognise the difference between tense and relaxed. With practice the ease position can be found in seconds and tension relieved quickly.

Learning to recognise when the tension is building up can prevent it becoming a problem.

Method:

Find a comfortable supported position and follow the sequence of 'orders'. Suggested positions are shown on the last page.

Sequence

- Work the muscles into a reverse position of stress
- Stop
- Register consciously the new position

Shoulders: 'Pull your shoulders towards your feet' ... 'Stop' ... 'Feel your shoulders are further away from your ears; your neck feels longer'.

Elbows: 'Elbows out and open' ... 'Stop' ... 'Feel your upper arms away from your body, elbows open; the weight of both arms resting on the support'.

Hands: 'Stretch your fingers and thumbs' ... 'Stop' ... 'Feel your fingers and thumbs open and long resting on the support. Especially feel your heavy thumbs'.

Hips: Turn your hips out' ... 'Stop' ... 'Feel your thighs rolled outwards'.

Knees: 'Move your knees until comfortable' ... 'Feel the open comfort in your knees'.

Feet: 'Push your feet away from your legs' ... 'Stop' ... 'Feel your heavy dangling feel'.

Body: 'Press your body onto the support' ... 'Stop' ... 'Feel the contact of your body sinking into the support'.

Head: 'Press your head into the support' ... 'Stop' ... 'Feel the weight of your head sinking into the support'.

Breathing: 'Take a deep breath then breathe out easily. Focus on calm even breathing letting tension go with each breath out'.

Jaw: 'Drag the jaw down' ... 'Stop' ... 'Feel the separated teeth, loose jaw, lips gently touching or slightly parted'.

Tongue: 'Press your tongue down' ... 'Stop' ... 'Feel your loose tongue gently resting against your lower teeth'.

Eyes: 'Gently close your eyes' ... 'Stop' ... 'Feel your upper lids resting gently over your eyes; enjoy the darkness'.

Forehead: 'Begin above the eye brows and think of smoothing gently up into your hair over the top of your head and downward to the back of your neck' ... 'Stop' ... 'Feel the smoothness of your forehead'.

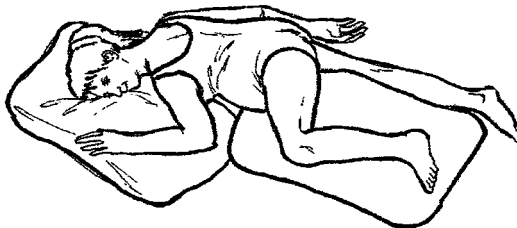
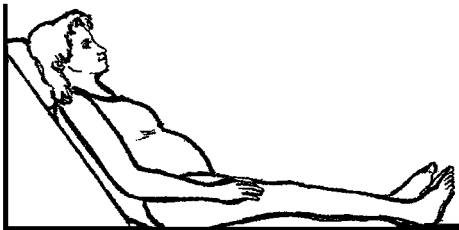
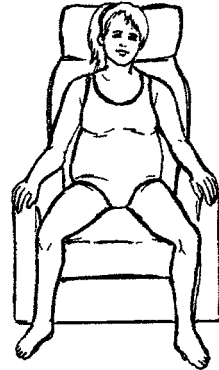
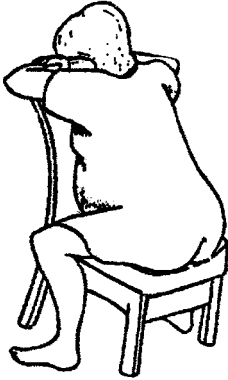
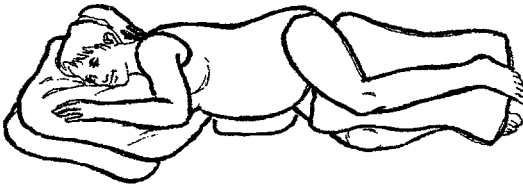
Mind: Either repeat the same sequence around the body or think of a song, prayer or poem or think of some pleasant experience. Let the mind play over these thoughts effortlessly to keep it occupied. Keep working through the same sequence again and again until tension eases.

Return to full activity

‘Stretch the limbs gently in all directions; take a few deep breaths, sit up slowly and wait for a minute or two before standing up’.

- Relaxation is a skill and you need to practice. Use it every day for short periods in the final weeks of pregnancy.
- At first use the same sequence. You will soon be able to use relaxation for short periods of rest or for deep relaxation to help you sleep.
- Practice using the techniques to eliminate or control tensions arising in your daily life.
- In labour use relaxation to control unnecessary and energy consuming build up of tension. As each contraction ends sigh out and ‘let go’.
- After the birth use relaxation to rest and help combat the emotional and physical stress that parenting often includes.

Try one of the positions below to get comfortable. Use pillows so that your limbs and head are well supported.



If you require further advice please contact a Women's Health physiotherapist.

Useful contact numbers

North Tyneside General Hospital

Rake Lane

North Shields NE29 8NH

03 44 811 8111, ext. 4064

Wansbeck General Hospital

Woodhorn Lane

Ashington NE63 9JJ

03 44 811 8111

Hexham General Hospital

Corbridge Road

Hexham NE46 1QJ

03 44 811 8111

Alnwick Infirmary

South Road

Alnwick NE66 2NS

(01665) 626 700, ext. 6750

Berwick Infirmary

Infirmary Square

Berwick-upon-Tweed TD15 1LT

(01289) 365 600, ext. 6643

Alternative Formats

If you would like a copy of this information in large print, another language, audio tape or other format please call the Contact Centre on **03 44 811 8118**

Other sources of information

NHS 111

NHS Choices

www.nhs.uk/pages/homepage.aspx

NICE (National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence)

www.nice.org.uk

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

Freephone: **0800 032 0202**

Text: 01670 511098

Email: northoftynepals@nhct.nhs.uk

Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust

General Enquiries **03 44 811 8111**

www.northumbria.nhs.uk

PIN 087/V4

Review date: June 2021

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