



Progressive After you can tell whether or not muscles are relaxed, try to relax your muscles without first tensing them. Start with your head and focus on small groups of muscles. Release these muscles when you breathe out. Move down your body until you are completely relaxed.

Touch Your partner can use the warmth and gentle pressure of his or her hand to help your muscles relax. Your partner needs to keep the touch firm but gentle and keep at least one hand on your body. Your partner's hands should stroke outward from the center of your body. It may also help to think of your partner's touch as a sponge that can wash away your tension.

Because relaxation is more than released muscle tension, you can also get relaxed by focusing on your inner state. When you calm your mind, your muscles also relax. You can use any method that works for you.

Imagery Imagine a comfortable, relaxed time like lying on warm sand or floating in water. Enjoy the feelings that come from remembering how your body felt. You can also imagine a favorite place. Enjoy the shapes, colors, sounds and smells of this special place.



Yoga and Meditation You can focus on your breathing or meditate on a word or sound to get and stay relaxed. You can use any technique that is useful to you.

Finally, if you run or do another rigorous activity, you can use your knowledge of breathing and body awareness to keep yourself relaxed during contractions.



The Golden Boat Here is some relaxation imagery you can use to calm your mind and relax your body:

Take a minute to get comfortable. Shift your position or rearrange your pillows so that all parts of your body feel supported.

Then, close your eyes and focus on your breathing. Take a couple of full, slow breaths. Release whatever tension you can with each exhale.

After the third breath, imagine a small, beautiful lake. Its blue water sparkles in the sunshine. On the shore of the lake is an enormous tree. There you will find a golden boat. The boat is just the right size for you. It is filled with soft cushions.

Step into the boat and settle yourself on the cushions. Your whole body feels supported and comfortable.

When you are ready, imagine the boat slowly drifting out from the shade of the tree, slowly drifting out into the sunlight.

First the sunlight is just on your head and neck. It warms your face and melts all the tension around your eyes and mouth. Enjoy the warmth on your face. Your skin feels smooth. Let your head settle further into the pillows.

Feel the sunlight warm your shoulders and arms, easing any tension there. Feel the spaces between your fingers as your hands open to the sun.

Breathe in the calmness of the clean air. Breathe out the tension you are holding in your body. Let the sun warm your chest and hips, dissolving any aches or tiredness.

As the boat drifts out into full sunlight, enjoy the soothing warmth on your legs and feet. Stretch and reposition them if you would like. Your whole body feels fluid and relaxed.

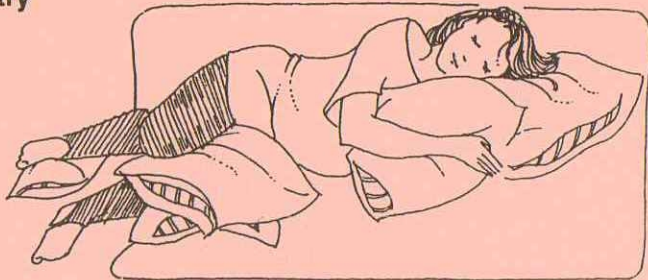
Enjoy the gentle breeze as it flows over your body, keeping you just the right temperature. Feel the gentle motion of the boat as it floats on the lake. Enjoy the peace and stillness.

When you are ready to return, the boat will drift back to the shore. When you get out of the boat, you will feel rested and refreshed.

You can come back to your golden boat whenever you wish. It is always there waiting for you.



Positions to try



Side-lying Lie on your left side with a pillow between your knees and another under your head. You can put other pillows under your stomach and between your arms.



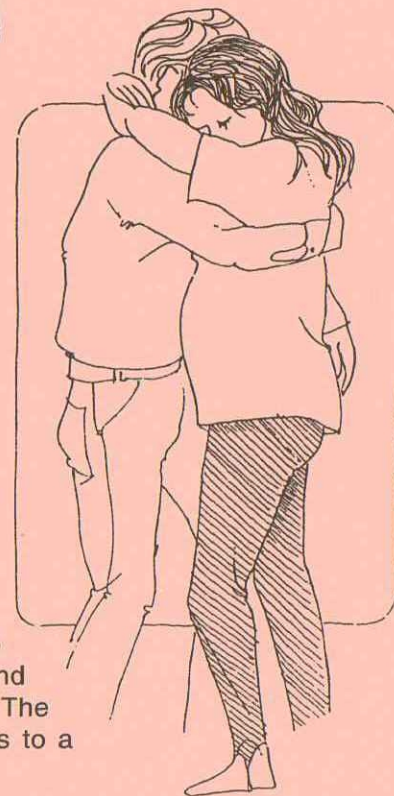
3/4 side-lying From a side-lying position, roll more toward your stomach and rest your lower arm along your side. You can put pillows under your stomach, chest and head.

Lounge chair Sit in a semi-reclining position with knees bent and your arms and knees supported by pillows. You can also recline in a warm bath.



Tailor sitting Sit with your knees bent and feet close to each other. Lean back against a support. You can also lean forward with your back rounded and your elbows resting on your knees.

Standing Stand with your knees slightly bent. Let your partner or furniture support your weight.



Ways to relax

One approach to relaxation is to focus on your muscle tension and consciously release that tension. The release of muscular tension leads to a sense of peacefulness.

Contract/Release This is a good way to get to know when your muscles are relaxed. Think about how each muscle feels when you tighten it and then when you release it. Start with your toes and move up to your head. Tighten muscle groups like your feet, lower legs, knees when you breathe in. Release the muscle tension when you breathe out.





Relaxation is one of the best tools for coping with labor.

- You can reduce pain and save energy by not tightening your muscles.
- You feel more comfortable and in control when you focus on relaxing rather than fighting the contractions.
- Most importantly, staying relaxed prevents the stress response. This “fight or flight” response slows the progress of labor. It can also make the contractions more painful. To prevent the stress response, it is important to get and stay relaxed between contractions. Even though you may not be able to stay completely relaxed during contractions, your ability to rest between contractions will help your body work efficiently.

The Relaxing Breath

You may want to use a slow, deep breath as a signal to relax. Take in a comfortable breath. Then let it out while relaxing your whole body. Taken at the beginning of a contraction, this breath may help you relax into the contraction rather than fight it. At the end of a contraction, this breath signals that you can rest until the next contraction starts. You can take a relaxing breath any time you feel your body getting tense.

Positions

To help you get and stay relaxed, it is important to get into a comfortable position. Explore various positions during pregnancy and change positions as often as necessary when you are in labor. With a good relaxation position

- your body has gentle curves and is supported by pillows, furniture or your labor partner
- no part of your body lies right on another
- you are not lying flat on your back. (When you lie flat, your uterus gets less blood, and your baby gets less oxygen.)