



ISSUE# 11

Article 6 : Try this: Practise for labour using a birth ball

Freedom of movement combined with comfortable support for the upper body, pelvis and legs can help you enormously to manage pain.

You will find that sitting or kneeling on the soft cushioned surface of the Active Birth Ball is especially comfortable during contractions. This will help to soothe, release and ease the pain so you are less likely to need interventions.

A birth ball is much softer and more malleable than a chair. You can sit supported and gently rotate your hips, sway back and forth or from side to side to ease the pain during contractions.

Being upright stimulates contractions and encourages your baby to descend more easily through your pelvis. All this helps to make labour faster and more efficient.

Gently swaying and rocking or rolling your pelvis, helps you to focus on the natural rhythm of your breathing. Meanwhile the good blood flow to the placenta in these positions helps to protect your baby by preventing foetal distress.

In the kneeling position the ball can be used in place of a beanbag. You can roll gently with the ball through the wave of each contraction.

Letting the ball support your weight completely, you can also rest comfortably in an upright position between contractions and conserve your energy. This is much more comfortable than kneeling over a chair, bed or on your hands and knees on the floor.

It's also ideal if you want your partner or a member of your birth team to hold you or to massage your back and practical if you are going into hospital as the ball can be inflated with a hand pump when you get there.

Kneeling and leaning forward helps to ease the pain and to get your baby moving down the birth canal. This is especially helpful if you have a "backache labour."

If your baby is lying 'posterior,' kneeling forward over a ball is a way to encourage your baby to turn into the more favourable anterior position.

The ball does not interfere with external or internal monitoring, TENS or any other complementary therapy. It can even be used for safe support when labour is induced or with a low dose or mobile epidural.

This will promote better circulation to the placenta, reducing the risk of side effects or foetal distress.

USEFUL TIPS

- *A warm soothing compress can be placed on the ball to maximise perineal softening and relaxation.*
- *Placed beside a water birth pool the ball provides an elevated seat for partner or midwife, making access to the mother easier.*

Try it out:

Sitting

Firstly test the height of your birth ball. Sit securely in the centre of the ball

with your knees apart and feet flat on the floor. This is important. You need your feet to be firmly in contact with the floor to feel secure. (You can make your ball lower by emptying a little of the air, or higher by adding a bit.) You can also hold onto the back of a chair with your hands if you want to.

Bounce up and down gently (tiny bounces please!) for a moment until you feel at ease on the ball. Relax your neck, shoulders and upper body. Now roll your hips, making a wide, circular movement with the ball.

Visualise the softening and opening of the round shape of your cervix (entrance to the womb). Imagine you are breathing through a contraction. Let your breathing flow freely, especially the exhalations. Imagine breathing the pain away each time you exhale.

Keep this up for about 45 seconds. Then relax for a minute or two and repeat twice more, imagining 3 consecutive contractions in labour.

Kneeling

Position your ball on a mat or soft surface, so your knees are protected when you kneel over it. You can stuff a pillow under your ankles so your legs feel well supported too.

Drape your arms over the ball (like a big hug), so that you are blissfully comfortable, with room for your belly to hang forward. Turn your head to one side so that your neck is relaxed.

Make sure that there is no feeling of strain in your lower back by letting your tailbone release down.

Now move freely, describing soft circles on the floor with the ball. Let your breathing flow naturally. Try exhaling slowly through the mouth and relaxing as you inhale through the nose. This is how women naturally tend to breathe during a contraction.

Don't forget to use your ball for sitting on instead of a chair, in the weeks approaching your birth!

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Active Birth Centre 25 Bickerton Road London N19 5JT Tel: 020 7281 6760 Fax: 020 7263 8098
www.activebirthcentre.com or mail@activebirthcentre.com