

Comfort Measures in Labour and Birth Summary

1. Positioning & Rhythm:

Assuming different positions that helps mother stay active, upright and open can help speed up labour, make mother more comfortable, and make labour and birth easier on baby. Finding her own rhythm (ie: swaying, rocking, etc.) can help mother concentrate on her body and baby, and not be distracted by outside things.

2. Active Relaxation:

When mother can remain relaxed both physically and emotionally, her body will continue to produce endorphins. She will also allow her body to work efficiently through her labour, thus making for a more comfortable and effective labour.

3. Vocalisation & Echo Feedback:

Low, abdominal sounds can be helpful sounds for mother to make during labour and birth. In making these types of sounds, she can further give in to the birthing process that is happening within her, as well as release some of the birth energy that can build up. When her birth partner uses echo feedback, s/he can help mother feel more at ease with her own vocalisation noises, as well as help her remember her voice rhythm that may have been occurring.

4. Counter-pressure:

This is a great tool that the birthing mother's support team can provide. Applying counter-pressure to various places on mother (ie: lower back, hips, etc.), can give her relatively instant relief of some of the localized pressure that can occur in a posterior labour, or even an anterior labour.

5. Hydrotherapy:

The use of water can play a large role in the comfort level for mother in labour and birth. Nicknamed the "midwife's epidural", warm water can help slow down the pain messages being sent to the brain, and replace some of the pain messages with ones of comfort and pleasure. Whether the use of hydrotherapy is immersion in a bath, or simply being in a shower, water can usually help mother relax and create the positive situation mentioned above in "Active Relaxation".

6. Massage:

Massage can be a good tool available to help mother stay relaxed in labour and birth. It can include massage of larger parts of her body (ie: back, legs, etc.), or smaller parts (ie: hands, feet, forehead, jaw, etc.). Mother can give her birth team direction as to where massage is best applied, how hard to knead, and for how long.

7. Hot/Cold Compress:

The use of hot or cold compresses can help direct mother to relax into a specific area (ie: perineum, back, belly, etc.), as well as decrease a certain amount of discomfort to that area.

8. Verbal Support & Encouragement:

Words can often be one of the most powerful tools a mother's birth team has, for good or for bad. Appropriate words can help mother feel validated in her efforts and experience, can help her feel less alone and isolated during this intense and personal time, or encourage her if she is feeling lost. On that same note, it is important that everyone in the birth room/area uses positive words and phrases, as anything discouraging or patronizing could have a negative impact on how mother is labouring and feeling.

9. Medications:

There may be an appropriate place and use for medications in your labour. There are several drugs available (please see handout entitled "Pain Management During Labour" by BCRCP for specific information on particular drugs), and some may be better utilized at different places in your labour than others. Understand that all drugs will have some risk attached to them, and as all drugs cross the placenta, they will reach the baby to a lesser or greater extent. By weighing out the risks and benefits to a particular drug in labour, you will make the best decision for you and your baby as to what to use, if and when.