

Seven Tips to Keep Your Cool during Labor and Childbirth

Labor and childbirth have often been equated with running a marathon, one of the most physically challenging feats the body can accomplish. While some would frown upon this comparison it is understandable. Labor and birth (birth being the passage of the newborn through the birth canal) can be quite exhaustive. They require a mom to use muscles she may never have known existed. It calls into play the abdominal muscles; internal/external obliques, rectus abdominis; the pelvic muscles; the gluteus minimus and maximus (your bottom) and many more depending on what positions she chooses for labor and birth.

There are many different coping strategies which can be used to facilitate, guide and support a mom during labor. Some of them involve partnering with significant others in her life; others require encouraging her to identify those things which soothe, relax and bring her comfort normally and can be transferred to the experience of labor and birth. These strategies should not be mistaken for controlling the entire labor and birth process, but instead be used to create an awareness which allows her to assume a proactive role in birthing her baby. By creating an atmosphere that reflects her inner power and beauty, she is able to have a more satisfying birth experience and it reduces the level of anxiety.

The reduction of anxiety to make delivery a more pleasant experience is cited as one of the Healthy People 2010 objectives for improving maternal, infant and child health (the Healthy People 2010, a set of health objectives designed to guide health professionals in achieving improved health results for Americans over the first decade of the new century).

The following seven tips for keeping your cool during labor serve as a springboard for creative ways to experience labor and birth. Each tip focuses on engaging the senses in the birth process. Words like manage, handle, and get through are purposely not used because they imply a combative situation. Every woman's labor and birth is unique; some more challenging than others. By being proactive in her attitude towards her labor and birth a woman assumes her rightful position in the hierarchy of life.

1. Drink fluids remaining hydrated will lower your core temperature, prevent lightheadedness and fatigue. Make your own flavored water. Use seltzer water with a spritz of fruit juice or plain water with a splash of lemon, orange, or lime.
2. Listen to your favorite tunes-record a variety of genres on your iPod, MP3, CD or cassette player to be used to guide or relax you, or help you meditate during the different phases of labor.
3. Look at your favorite pictures-visually stimulating images are great to use as tools for self-guided relaxation and/or visualization.
4. Program your cell phone with the top 3 people in your life you can count on in a crunch. Remember select them with care; they will serve as your sounding board, cheering section or whatever you require.
5. Close your eyes and gently spritz over your head using a soothing fragrant mist. Consider lavender for calming and lemon or other citrus scent for reviving.
6. Write a brief letter to yourself reminding you why you decided to become a parent, to welcome your new baby, or express your love to your partner.
7. Travel with your favorite (fill in the blank): scent, picture, saying, book, magazine, article, pillow, blanket, robe, nightgown, charm, bible verse, poem, or whatever you find uplifting.

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