

The Birthplace at Stormont-Vail Health  
**BREATHING TECHNIQUES**

**SIGNAL/CLEANSING BREATH**

This is a signal to all involved in supporting the laboring woman that a contraction is beginning. It is a signal to consciously relax and to begin a coping technique if needed. By taking a deep breath in through the nose and exhaling out through the mouth, there is an increase in oxygen in the mother's system which will aid both her and the baby during the contraction. A Signal Breath is again utilized at the end of the contraction for this increase in oxygen and also as a non-verbal cue to those around that the contraction is over. This technique is used in all phases of labor and in coordination with most coping techniques.

**SLOW CHEST**

This breathing technique can be used in early labor and throughout labor. It is an inhalation through the nose followed by an exhalation through the mouth. This is done slowly (about 7-8 times a minute), effortlessly and as high up in the chest as comfortable. The exchange of air should remain even during inhalation and exhalation. This technique is applicable to all phases of labor and may be used during less intense moments as well as to promote relaxation between contractions.

**“PUFF-BLOW”**

Used in early or active labor, this breathing technique consists of a deep inhalation through the nose followed by a pant and a blow through the mouth. It should be done slowly, about 7-8 times per minute. The pant or puff is short and the blow sound is long. It might sound like “hah-whoooo” or “huh-whoooo” or the only sound that is heard is that of the exhaled air.

**RATIO BREATHING**

Used in active labor and transition, this breathing technique consists of a ratio of pants to a blow. Most frequently it is done in a three pants to one blow ratio. Inhale when comfortable between each pattern. Start slowly and speed up as needed during the peak of the contraction and then slow down again when the contraction begins to ease off. It might sound like “he-he-he-whooo” or the only sound that is heard is that of the exhaled air.

**ONE'S OWN BREATHING**

Any breathing pattern that feels good, comes naturally to you and does not cause hyperventilation, can be used during any point of labor. The important thing about using your own breathing pattern is that it should be rhythmic and promote relaxation. All breathing techniques (with the exception of slow chest) can be done with just the sound of breathing, but also may be spoken with the natural sounds made when doing the technique. Practice both.

**PRACTICE**

While these techniques are simple and can be taught even during labor, some people feel that by practicing them before hand, they will become a conditioned response and therefore, be automatic and their familiarity more comforting in labor. Each night when you lay down to sleep, spend a minute or two reviewing the breaths and practice one or more technique. I promise that the breathing patterns are what participants report to be the most helpful learned technique from my class!