Breathing Technique #1

**SLEEP BREATHING** - This breath is a simple relaxation technique designed to help you enter a relaxed state. Use this breath at the beginning of each relaxation practice to help your body gradually slip into a comfortable state of relaxation.

**POSITIONING** – Relax and settle into a comfortable chair, couch or bed. Support your head and neck with pillows. For comfort and to keep your body loose and limp, roll or fold a pillow under your knees so hips, joints and knees will be slightly bent. Allow your shoulders to open outward and sink into the frame of your body. Gently lean your head forward towards your chest or let it rest back onto the pillows. Allow your eyelids to gently meet without forcing them shut. Your mouth should be softly closed with lips touching lightly. Place the tip of your tongue at the back of your upper teeth allowing your lower jaw to relax.

**TECHNIQUE** – Inhale and exhale through your nose. Draw in a breath from your stomach to a mental count of four “In 1-2-3-4”. Feel you stomach rise as you draw the breath up and into the back of your throat. (Pause) Exhale, mentally recite “Out 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8.” As you breathe out very slowly through your nose, direct the energy of the breath down and inward toward the back of your throat, allowing your shoulders to droop into the frame of your body. Release all tension and let go. Continue the mental count for a few rounds of breath; allow your natural rhythm to take over when you are comfortable with the technique.

To determine if you are doing this exercise correctly, place your left hand on your stomach and your right hand on the lower part of your chest. As you inhale, you should feel your left hand rising as though your stomach were inflating like a balloon. As you exhale, you will feel your hands fold into each other as your chest and stomach create a crevice.

This is an easy breath to master. Use it regularly during relaxations at home or if you need a quick stress reducer. You will feel relaxation comes more easily and more rapidly each time you do it. After only a few times, you will notice that your body responds and moves quickly into a deep state of relaxation.
Breathing Technique #2

**Slow Breathing** – This breath is a long, quiet, slow intake of breath from your abdomen that redirects your focus to help you work with each surge. (Contraction) The goal of slow breathing is to make your breath both in and out, as long as possible. Use this technique through labor to coincide with each surge.

**Technique** – Rest your back against pillows or lying in a lateral position, place your hands across the top of your abdomen so that your fingers barely meet. Exhale briefly to clear your lungs and nasal passages. *Slowly* and gradually draw in your breath to a *rapid* count from 1 to 20+, as though you were inflating your belly. Keep your body still and limp – not stiff – while you breathe up each surge. Visualize filling a balloon inside your abdomen as you draw in. *Slowly* exhale to the same count, breathing downward and outward. Visualize the balloon slowly drifting off into space. Give your breath to your baby, gently and slowly exhaling down into your vagina.

You will be working in concert with the upward movement of the uterus as you breathe your abdomen up to the highest possible height. The slow intake to a rapid count up to 20+ and the equally slow exhalation will allow you sufficient time to work with each surge. If you need to take a second breath during a surge, do so in the very same manner. Do not hold your breath!

You may only be able to reach an intake count of 13 to 15 when you first start practicing. Each time you do this exercise, your count will rapidly increase. As with sleep breathing, once you have mastered the concept and technique, you will not need to use numbers unless you want to. It should be practiced every day for a few minutes. When you awaken in the morning and before you fall asleep at night is a good time to practice.
Breathing Technique #3

*Mother Directed Birth Breathing* – As your baby’s head becomes visible, use this downward breath to help birth the baby past the opening folds of the perineum. While in labor, follow your body’s lead and work with it when you feel the onset of a surge.

*Technique* – Allow your eyes to remain gently closed. Place the tip of your tongue at the back of your upper teeth, allow your lower jaw to recede and relax. When you feel the onset of a surge, follow it. Take in a short but deep breath through your nose and direct the energy of the breath to the lower back of your throat and down through your body behind your baby in the form of a “J” – down and forward. Allow the muscles in your vaginal area to open as though you were letting the breath out through them. Don’t hang on to a breath beyond its effectiveness. Repeat this process by taking in another short, deep breath and breathe down in the same pattern as above – and then another. Repeat this motion several times with each surge as your body leads you.

Firmly direct your breathing down through your body. Don’t let the thrust of your breath escape through your mouth.

Only practice this breath a few weeks before your expected birth time. The best place to practice is on the toilet as you are moving your bowels. Become aware of the pulsations that move the stool down and out. Your breaths are short intakes with gentle nudging breaths downward – nothing forceful.