

BIRTH PREPARATION ROUTINE

The following exercises will help you activate and coordinate your abdominal and pelvic floor muscles to facilitate childbirth. Learning to work these muscles in tandem will mimic what you are trying to achieve during labour. We suggest working on the abdominal and the pelvic floor muscle exercises *separately*, prior to bringing the 2 parts together. It is recommended that you first read the chapter “Your Silent Training Partner - Your Pelvic Floor Muscles” to review how to perform the pelvic floor strengthening exercises correctly. You will be working through 4 different stages, so it is best to start as early as possible. No worries if you are receiving this information late in your pregnancy, as it is never too late to start. There is no correct amount of time that you should spend at each stage; the progression is based on your own comfort level.

We suggest breaking up the stages into 4 equal time lines that correspond to the remaining number of weeks until your due date. For instance, if you are currently in your 20th week, you can work on each stage for approximately 5 weeks. Below is the description of the Birth Preparation Routine. All exercises can be performed seated, lying down or standing. Aim for 2-3 sets per day.

Stage 1:

Abdominal Exercise

- Practice pulling your belly button in (like when you are anticipating a blow to the stomach). Hold for a 1-2 count.
- Release and repeat 10-15 times.

Pelvic Floor Exercise

- Perform the basic contraction exercise as described in the chapter “Your Silent Training Partner – Your Pelvic Floor Muscles”. Pull the pelvic floor muscles up and hold for a 1-2 count.
- Release and repeat 10-15 times.

Stage 2:

Abdominal Exercise

- Take a deep breath in and let your belly go (e.g. do not hold or suck your belly in).
- As you breathe out, pull your belly button in as though you are giving your baby a hug from the inside.
- Hold your hug for 10 seconds. You will need to modify your breathing so that you can breathe without letting the hug go.
- Release and repeat many times throughout the day.

Pelvic Floor Exercise

- Perform the elevator exercise described in the chapter “Your Silent Training Partner – Your Pelvic Floor Muscles”.
- Using the elevator as an analogy: Think of an elevator that goes up and down to different floors of an apartment building. You want to control how high and how low your pelvic floor muscles are working by contracting and releasing them appropriately. Imagine there are 5 floors. Draw up the pelvic floor muscles one floor at a time (e.g. 1-2-3-4-5).
- You can either go straight up and down the floors or you can add in some variation by mixing up the floors. You do not have to worry about “going into the basement” yet.
- Attempt this exercise many times throughout the day.

Stage 3:

Abdominal Exercise

- Take a deep breath in and let your belly go.
- As you breathe out, pull your belly button in as though you are giving your baby a hug from the inside.

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- Hold your hug for 20-30 seconds. You will need to modify your breathing so that you can breathe without letting the hug go. Rest assured, you are not harming your baby.
- Release and repeat this exercise many times throughout the day.

Pelvic Floor Exercise

- You are still riding the elevator, but now you want to teach your pelvic floor muscles to relax completely and “go into the basement”.
- The goal is to ensure you have enough control over your pelvic floor muscles and can relax them almost on command. You will need this technique when it comes time to push.
- Attempt this exercise many times throughout the day. You and your partner may want to use the words “go into the basement” (or something more to your liking) as a key phrase during labour. This will help to recognize when you need to relax the pelvic floor muscles and push.

Stage 4:

Bringing the 2 Exercises Together

- You are now going to practice putting these 2 exercises together and mimic what you will be doing in labour: contracting (or engaging) the abdominals while also releasing the pelvic floor muscles “into the basement”.
- Take a deep breath in and let your belly go.
- As you breathe out, pull your belly button in and squeeze your pelvic floor muscles up.
- While you are holding your belly button in, release your pelvic floor muscles “into the basement”.
- Aim to do this for 10-15 seconds.
- Attempt to do this exercise many times throughout the day. Remember that this coordination between your abdominal and pelvic floor muscles will not necessarily happen automatically. Similar to any other muscle needed to perform an intense activity, you will have to train these muscles before they can benefit you in the delivery room.

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