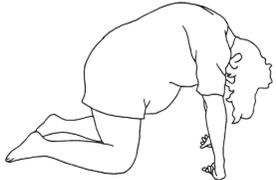


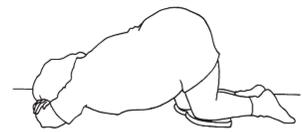
Backache in Labor

by Penny Simkin, PT, CD(DONA)

One in four people in labor feel intense backache during labor contractions. Such "back labor" may be due to the position of the baby's head or the shape of the birthing person's pelvis or spinal flexibility. Relaxation and breathing are not enough to cope with such pain. Here are some suggestions for additional ways to deal with backache during labor.

Use positions and movements to encourage the baby into a favorable position, speed a labor that has slowed down, or relieve back pain.	
<p>Side-lying. Lying on one side with both hips and knees flexed, and a pillow between her knees.</p>	
<p>Semi-prone. Lying on one side with the lower arm behind or in front and their lower leg out straight, flex the upper hip and knee, resting the knee on a doubled-up pillow and rolls toward the front.</p>	
<p>Spend time on hands and knees or kneeling and leaning forward with the upper body on a chair or a birth ball (a large physical therapy ball). Some labor beds can be arranged to support people in this position.</p>	
<p>Pelvic Rocking. While kneeling and leaning forward, the birthing person rocks their pelvis forward and back, or in a circle. This helps dislodge the baby within the pelvis, encouraging rotation.</p>	
<p>Standing and walking take advantage of gravity in encouraging descent of the baby.</p>	
<p>Slow dancing (standing and swaying side to side while being embraced by the partner) helps.</p>	
<p>The Lunge. Standing upright beside a chair and facing forward, the birthing person places one foot on the chair seat, with their knee and foot pointing to one side, hips and torso facing forward. While the upper trunk remains upright, they slowly "lunge" sideways, toward the chair for a slow count of 5 then returns to upright. They should lunge through one contraction and then then lunge on the opposite side. Continue for five or six contractions lunging to the side that is most comfortable. This can also be done from a kneeling position.</p>	
<p>Abdominal Lifting. While standing, the birthing person interlocks the fingers of both hands and places them underneath their belly against the pubic bone. During the contractions, they lift their abdomen up and slightly in, while bending their knees. This often relieves back pain while improving the position of the baby in the pelvis.</p>	

The **Open Knee-Chest** position may help reposition an OP baby if used during very early labor. If the birthing person has frequent irregular painful contractions causing back pain, and the cervix is not dilating, try this. Be sure the buttocks are high in the air (see illustration). Remains in that position for 30 to 45 minutes. The back pain often disappears in this position.



Comfort measures for the doula or birth partner to use. These can be used with the above positions and movements to help reduce back pain.

Counterpressure. Holding the front of the birthing person's hip with one hand (to help them maintain balance) press steadily and firmly (with your fist or the heel of your hand) in one spot in the low back or buttocks area. They will help you know what spot to press—it varies from person to person and may change as labor progresses. Try pressing in several places and they will tell you when you have found it.

You usually must press very hard during every contraction. This is very helpful in coping with the back pain. Between contractions you might massage the area or use cold or hot compresses, described below.



The **Double Hip Squeeze.** The birthing person stands or kneels and leans forward. From behind, press on both sides of their buttocks with the palms of your hands. Apply pressure toward the center (pressing the hips together). Experiment to find the right places to press. Do this during contractions. Apply as much pressure as needed.



Cold or Warm Compresses. Place an ice pack, hot water bottle, cold or hot wet towel, frozen folded wet washcloth, or silica gel pack on the low back between contractions to relieve back pain. Cold usually is more effective because of its numbing effects. *Before applying a cold pack, be sure the birthing person is warm. If their hands, feet or nose are cold, wrap them in a warm blanket and put socks on before applying the cold pack. Also, be sure there are one or more layers of cloth between their skin and the cold or hot pack, so that they will feel a gradual increase in cold or warmth. Do not place warm or cold items on any area affected by an epidural.*



Shower or Bath. Direct the shower against the low back. It helps immensely. Both baths and showers are very relaxing and may help a great deal with back pain.



Rolling Pressure. Over the Low Back. A rolling massager or a can of frozen juice or cold soda pop (keep a six pack in a bowl of ice, so you'll always have a cold can) rolled over the low back is soothing during or between contractions. Since such tools are rarely available in the hospital, you might bring them in, especially if they are having back labor at home.

Illustrations by Shanna dela Cruz (© 1999, 2005 by Ruth Ancheta) from The Labor Progress Handbook: Early Interventions to Prevent and Treat Dystocia, by Penny Simkin and Ruth Ancheta (Blackwell Science, 2005). Reproduced with permission.