



# Touch Relaxation

Touch relaxation is a method for labor in which one person calms another through touch. Staying relaxed during labor is important to increasing your sense of calm and security, and decreasing pain. But it's easy to tense up and not even realize it. In touch relaxation, your labor partner uses their hands to find muscles where you are storing tension. Their warm, firm touch helps you release those muscles so that you can become more fully relaxed and cope better with contractions.

How does touch relaxation work? During labor, touch serves as a nonverbal message saying "relax" and "I care about you." Also, there is a theory that pain sensations can be interrupted or blocked by messages from the touch receptors in the skin, thereby reducing perception of pain. Pain messages travel to the brain mostly along small-diameter nerve fibers. Pressure and temperature messages travel to the brain on large-diameter nerve fibers. Information travels faster on large nerves than small ones. That means that if you are being touched by your labor partner or using a heat pack, that touch or heat message can get to the brain faster than the pain message, so that the pain message is interrupted or weakened.

## **To practice with your partner:**

It's important to practice this method, so that during labor, your partner knows how and where you store tension. Find a comfortable position lying down or sitting so that your weight is fully supported by the surface beneath you. You (the "Relaxer") will contract a set of muscles, then your partner will touch those muscles with a firm, relaxed, warm hand. You will release the muscle tension immediately and relax toward your partner's hand. If the touch felt good, tell your partner. If not, let them know what would feel better.

**Relaxer:** Tense your forehead by making an exaggerated frown.

**Partner:** Slowly stroke the brow with the pads of the fingers, from the bridge of the nose out towards the temple. Massage the temples.

**Relaxer:** Tense your shoulders by pulling them forward and hunching your back.

**Partner:** Apply firm pressure on both shoulders and push them back into a relaxed position. Massage shoulders and back of neck.

**Relaxer:** Make a fist contracting the muscles of one arm while it rests on a surface.

**Partner:** Stroke (or massage) slowly and firmly down the arm with both hands, one on each side of the arm. Massage hands and fingers.

**Relaxer:** Contract the muscles of the leg on the same side of the body.

**Partner:** Stroke (or massage) firmly down the leg with both hands, one on each side of the leg. Massage feet.

**Relaxer:** Repeat with the arm and leg on other side.

**Partner:** Repeat arm and leg massage.

Now that you are fully relaxed, think about what this feels like. What does it feel like when your mind is totally relaxed? ... What does it feel like when your muscles are totally relaxed? ... What does it feel like when your breathing is totally relaxed? Remember this feeling so that you can come back to this state of relaxation when you need to.

SOURCE: Relaxation and Visualization (J. Janke)