



Touch

Part 1: Touch -Understanding & Considerations.

Touch can be used to help ease the birth process. The way a woman is touched and cared for in labour not only has the ability to relieve discomfort it also has the capacity to beneficially alter her birthing experience.

Anyone with whom a birthing mother feels safe can be of some help. However, to really be effective at supporting a mother through the birth process there are a few points for the partner or support /person /care-giver to remember:

1. Establish a safe birthing space.
2. Stay positive and encouraging.
3. Create a birth massaging kit of what you think you will need such as oils etc.
4. Watch you own body mechanics and remember your own self-care.

Touch is potent. It can help to generate helpful hormonal flows. Touch can communicate care and love as well as fostering a sense of emotional wellbeing for both the woman and her baby in the transformative process of birth.

Birth as you most probably are already aware is a pivotal life event. The impressions of the labor and birth will stay with the mother and her child for their lifetime. So it is worth the while taking the time to fine-tune your skills in the simple art of touch.

Touch is a language that arises before words and is understood beyond words. This is because we perceive the experience of touch through our largest and most primary sense organ, the skin. During embryonic development the skin comes from the same tissue as the brain and nervous system it develops before the eyes and ears.

Touch during labor can be powerful. Some Research has indicated that even in its simplest form of touch such as the stroking of a forehead or holding someone's hand can have a beneficial effect on the outcome of a birth.

Interestingly the benefits of caring compassionate touch carry on way beyond the birth. Women who receive regular compassionate touch during pregnancy and labor tend to touch their infants more often stimulating infant growth and brain development. (Mother Touch 2009)

Some studies have shown that regular touch during the pregnancy, labor and birth can enhance the production of pregnancy hormones lowering anxiety and stress. Resulting in a decrease in premature deliveries and birth complications. (Mother Touch, 2009)

A meta-analysis of studies done in the 1990's with over fifteen hundred women: showed that nurturing touch in labor resulted in the following benefits.

- * Reduced levels of discomfort.
 - * Reduced need for medical forms of pain relief.
 - * Overall shorter time spent in labor.
 - * Reduction in Caesarian Section rates
 - * Reduction in medical interventions such as forceps and epidurals.
 - * Increased bonding between mother and child
 - * And an overall satisfaction with the birth experience.
- (Mother Touch 2009)

Key Points to remember when working with women in labour are:

1. Slow down it is very important that the mother doesn't feel rushed in any way as rushing sends unhelpful hormones in labor into over drive.
2. Use simple questions that only require a yes or no answer.
3. Speak between the waves not during them.
4. Keep your voice low because that is where you want the baby to be.

A woman's touch needs change constantly through out labor. This requires the birth companion to be inventive and adaptable, and also not to take personally her changing responses to what previously felt good.

Generally women who receive regular massages during pregnancy respond more favorably to touch in labor.

I suggest a mother try a new type of touch for three contractions before refusing it. To give her a chance to feel it, let her sensations change, and then decide if she likes it or not.

It is here where you watch and listen as to how the mother is responding to your touch. Simply consider the following:

Do her muscles seem to soften when you touch her?

If so where does she tighten up?

How can I adjust my touch to support relaxation in / at this moment?

In my experience if your touch is too firm the mother will move away from you. If it is not firm enough they tend to back into you in an effort to increase the firmness.

Watch how the mother is breathing if her breathing is becoming shallow and irregular she may not be coping as well as she could

If stroking is too stimulating for her sometimes a gentle touch without movement is more effective.

Keep in mind women have a lot of different needs and some women don't want to be touched at all! They don't want to be disturbed. They are busy. They may want to go way inward, focus inside. Any touch, any stimulation, or any words are very disturbing and distracting.

It takes a bit of awareness and a bit of time to understand what the woman needs and how to "dance" with her. You have to find out what her particular rhythm is.

If at any time you find that you are out of synchrony with the laboring woman, observe the way that she is breathing. Match and pace her pattern of breathing with your own. If her breathing is very shallow and fast gradually alter your breathing so that it becomes slower and deeper. More than likely the mother will follow your lead.

This little trick is very effective if at the same time you are maintaining eye contact with the woman. I call it the "Take Charge Routine".

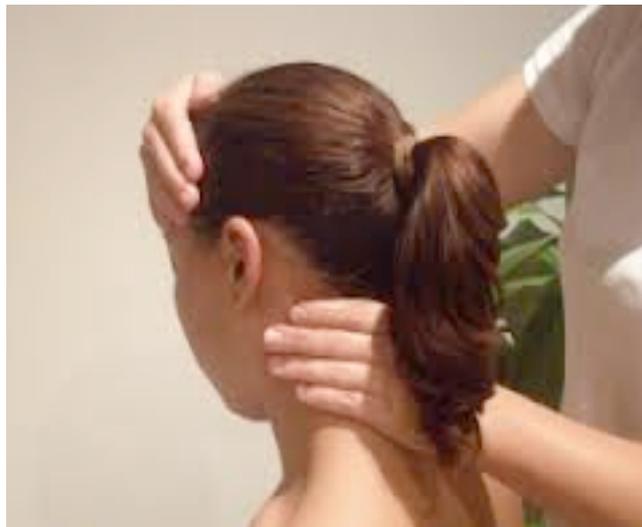
The Take Charge routine is very helpful if the mother is becoming anxious or fearful. It works a treat and is a great little strategy to have in your toolbox as you support the mother through this amazing transformative process of birth.

Part 2: Touch Techniques.

Generally slow smooth and firm strokes are optimal for women in labor. All strokes should have the intension of calming the mother as this enhances the release of endorphins the bodies natural pain relieving hormones and decreases the levels of stress related chemicals which can cause the labor to stall or sow down.

Acupressure is an ancient system of healing that uses focused pressure to stimulate energy meridians in the body. Many of these points could be useful for you to be aware of. If you plan to use any of the points, it is important to access acupressure points slowly, gradually increasing pressure while maintaining the woman's comfort. Acupressure points can be held through contractions or between them.

Touch for the Head Neck and Shoulders.

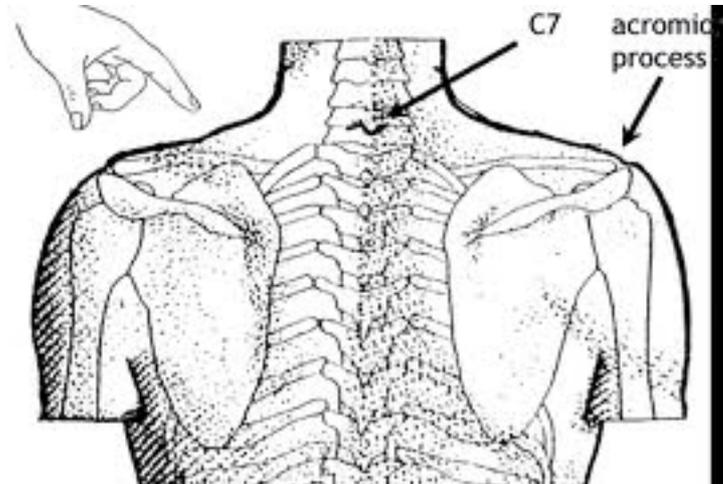


Slow nurturing massage to the head neck and shoulders can calm the mind and relieve tension. Massage to this area can be particularly useful for example if the mother is stuck in bed because she is being monitored or has had an epidural. Long slow firm strokes directing energy from the shoulders down the arms and out through the hands can be every effective for relieving tension from the upper body.

Massaging and kneading the muscles at the base of the skull and down the back of the neck can refresh and renew her energy and encourage the mother to stay in a positive mind-set.

When you are working on the neck put your other hand on her forehead to this is partly to stabilize her head while you are working on her neck but it is also very calming and helps the mother feel safe contained and supported by your presence.

Shoulder Acupressure Gallbladder 21 (G21)



On the top of the shoulders is an acupressure point known as gallbladder 21. It is located midway between the bottom of the neck and the outside of the shoulder. This energy point encourages energy in the body (and the baby) to move down into and out of the pelvis.

Gallbladder 21 will also be a very useful point to know as it eases pain and neck tension so it can be very handy in a difficult labor, because it enhances the effectiveness of the contractions. You can use your forearms thumbs or elbows and press slowly and gently into this point.

Please do not activate Gallbladder 21 until after 38 weeks of the pregnancy!

Touch for the Jaw.



The jaw is thought to be some how related to the pelvis cervix and perineal area. If a woman's cervix isn't dilating, or she has a lot of tension in the pelvis, you may also notice that she also has tension in her jaw. Or visa versa.

It is believed that releasing the jaw can also help the woman to dilate her cervix more efficiently.

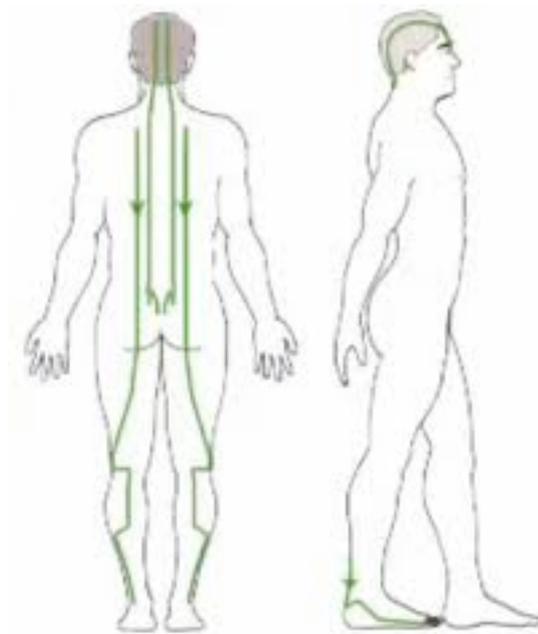
Support the chin area, gently press the skin area between the bottom and top jaw bones whilst mother has her mouth open and slightly relaxed slowly as you move your fingers of your hands similar to a separating movement between the jaw bones.

Make circles on the jaw area jiggle the jaw or take two fingers from both of your hands and let them sink slowly into the muscular area of the cheek and jaw. Let your fingers slide apart slowly in many directions like spokes on a wheel.

Please note that this does not work on a closed or clenched jaw. The jaw can be a tender area for many women so work gently and carefully and ensure that you touch is not to deep for her comfort.

Ina May Gaskin (2003) says that a woman can figure out how to relax their jaws more easily than there bottoms and when they do this it can help them avoid tearing or needing a episiotomy (an incision to enlarge the vaginal out let).

Touch for the Back.



Stroking along either side of the spine can help to alleviate back pain. Long, slow strokes down the back can along the Bladder Meridian be very comforting during contractions in the early stages of labor.

Acupressure for the Bladder Meridian is located on either side of the spine from the neck all the way down to the feet. The Bladder Meridian According to the acupressure system of healing is especially useful in labor for:

- Reducing fear.
- Renewing energy
- Releasing back tension, and
- Grounding the women

To find these points, find the spinal vertebra and then slide your fingers into the spaces between the ribs and spine following them all the way down into the bottom and legs and finish by holding the back of the heels and feet.

Often the muscles where these points reside are very tense and they will soften with your touch.

Breathe in and out with the woman as you touch her. Pressing firmly into these points as she exhales and then moving your hands to the next new point as you both inhale and apply more pressure on the exhalation.

Alternatively, ask the mother to extend her exhalation as you continue to flow downwards with your touch finishing at the ankles.

This type of massage enhances the down ward energy that will help to calm the mind, ease pain, keep the woman grounded and reduce fear. Which, in turn will help her cervix to dilate!

Massage from the top down in the same direction that the baby needs to use to come out. If the mother is standing during a contraction start at the top of her shoulders then draw your hands down in slow consistent strokes.

Imaging energy flowing similar to a river through the mothers body. You could think about what you are doing in terms of working with energy, either dispersing the energy from where it collects and stagnates, calling in new energy, or filling the woman with renewed vitality.

Touch for the Sacrum and Hips.



Many women feel discomfort in the sacral area during labor. Firm touch can often relieve this. The sacrum is the triangular flat bone between the hipbones and the buttocks.

To the ancient Roman's and Greek's the sacrum was considered a "sacred" bone meaning a temple or holy place. It is thought that because the sacrum is very important because it helps to create this sacred bowl that holds the uterus and the ovaries and other the sacred organs of pro-creation, protecting them from external forces.

It is also the stabilizing base of the spine that acts like an internal guidance system helping to guide the baby down and out of the pelvis.

Counter pressure on the sacrum is tremendously comforting to most women as the baby pushes on this bone as he or she continues their decent through the pelvis.

Counter pressure on the sacrum and the sacral foramen are also part of the Bladder Meridian acupressure points. The ones in the sacrum are specifically helpful for the pelvic region, back pain or distributing any energy that could be accumulating there.

Place your middle finger at the top of the groove between the buttocks align your palm with the mother's spine and then you are on the sacrum.

Strong counter pressure to the sacrum during contractions can help to reduce the feeling of intensity that many mothers experience when they are becoming close to being fully dilated. Apply pressure directly to the middle of the sacrum to avoid the possibility of creating an imbalance between one side and the other.

Since such a strong consistent pressure can be required that may result in your hands body and mind may become quite tired. You can try using your forearms, elbows, fists, knees or feet. Also this is a big hint to use various techniques to vary the intensity and, to reduce the wear and tear on your own body.

The sacrum has a number of openings through which pass pelvic nerves. These openings are also called Sacral Foramina also located here are some Bladder Meridian Acupressure Points.

These points are particularly helpful during labor for any back discomfort. As well as stimulating contractions and encouraging dilation of the cervix

To locate these points locate the center of the top of the mother's sacrum and slide your fingers out one or two thumb widths there you might find a slight indentation this is the sacral foramen. When you find this place or a place that just feels right, then very gently just press in during contractions.

Occasionally there is one point that will completely alleviate the experience of pain felt the back. If you find one of these sweet spots just hold the pressure there for as long as is comfortable and is working for the both of you.

Hip Compression.



As the pelvis spreads open to make way for baby the hips can become quite sore You can use your hands or forearms to sweep energy out of the hips and down into the buttocks dispersing tension by continuing this stroke down the thighs and legs and continue down into the feet.

Step 1.

With the mother in the hands and knees position you may also choose to press into the hips squeezing the hipbones toward the center of her body.

Step 2.

Then slide your hands around under the belly lifting the belly up near the groin and slide up and around again to press into the hips again remember to have a firm but gentle pressure when sliding your hands along the belly increasing your pressure slightly at the hips.

Touch for the Hands.

There is an abundance of touch receptors located in the palms of the hands as well as in the soles of the feet. When these receptors are stimulated with pressure, cold or vibration they rapidly transmit these types of sensations to the central nervous system. Fortunately for us, these touch receptors travel very quickly. More rapidly in fact than pain impulses can travel.

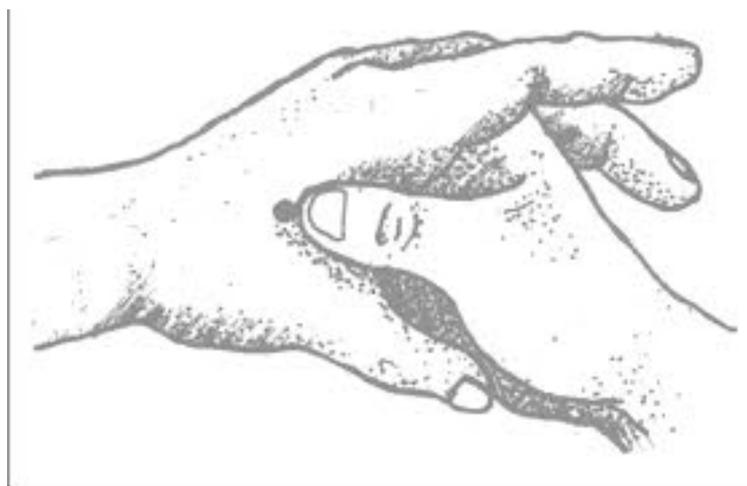
Firm massage to the hands can effectively stimulate these sensory receptors filling the gateway to the central nervous system with pleasurable or neutral sensations this then leaves less room for the slower more intense sensations to be processed.

Women who have had frequent hand massage or even just hand holding report the benefits of a calming energy, the reduction of tension from the neck and shoulders and a general feeling of being well supported.

General massage to the hand can include opening the palm spreading the fingers and pressing into the palm to release tension. This technique is very helpful for women who tend to clench their fists or grip strongly during contractions.

There are two acupressure points on the hands Large Intestine 4 (L4) and Pericardium 8 (P8) that are quite useful during labor.

Large Intestine 4 (LI 4)



Please be careful Large Intestine 4 is a point that is contraindicated during pregnancy. So do not use it before 38 weeks gestation.

This point helps prepare the body for labor by:

- Increasing contraction strength and intensity.
- Helps mothers generally cope better with contractions.

This point is located in the webbing between the thumb and index finger. To find this point press the woman's thumb against her index finger and locate the mound that forms on top of the hand, just above the crease. The point is in the center of that mound against the bone. Squeeze directly into the webbing pushing it up against the bone of the forefinger.

Many women like this because it can help to reduce discomfort if it is held during contractions. During contractions hold the pressure at a level where the mother feels the sensation but it is not excessively painful. Relax the pressure between contractions perhaps some long strokes down the arms to finish

Pericardium 8 (P8)



The point on the palm, in the middle of the hand where the middle finger touches when bent forward is a point called pericardium 8. This acupressure point is very calming and is easy to press into any time you are holding a hand. If a mother is becoming anxious you can use this point to support her relaxation while also reminding her to slow her breathing down and providing gentle positive encouragement.

Touch for the Feet.

Foot massage can give the support person a relaxing way to touch while also giving the mother a full body benefits stimulating acupressure points and reflexology zones on the feet.

Reflexology is a bodywork system that uses pressure points on the hands and feet to stimulate and balance energy in the organs and in other regions in the body.

Similar to the palms in the hands the feet contain an abundance of sensory receptors that are especially sensitive to deep pressure holding vibration and cold.

With these types of stimulation touch receptors will transmit impulses more rapidly than they transmit stronger sensations thereby flooding the woman's nervous system with more pleasurable feelings that over run sensitivity to the slower moving uncomfortable impulses.

There are also some points on the foot that can be very useful for women who are experiencing anxiety.

One caution with feet though, if a mother has a great deal of swelling avoid strong pressure to the area which can damage tissue. Also avoid too many downward strokes, which can increase the swelling.

Instead touch the feet with light strokes in the direction of the heart or simply hold the feet. You can use oil or lotion to allow for smooth gliding work press into the sole of her foot slide your palms over the top rotate and squeeze the toes Some women find that just holding a few toes together helpful.

Squeeze the base of the toes and slide your fingers between them to stimulate the area, which in foot reflexology, which related to the neck and the head this, can be very sedating for the mother.

There are several acupressure points in the foot that can be useful for bringing energy down and supporting labor such as:

Kidney 1(K1 = Bubbling Spring)



In the center of the foot is an acupressure point known as bubbling spring or kidney 1 this point is considered to be a revival point that can introduce fresh new energy to the body as well as being calming and grounding. Press into the midline of the foot just below the ball and slowly rub or hold pressure during or between contractions.

Liver 3 (L3)



Liver 3 is located on the top of the foot this point is useful for decreasing pain in labor, moving the energy down and out of the body. As well as for emotional balance, headaches, and low back pain.

To find liver 3 slide up the valley on top of the foot between the big toe and the next to the peak of the valley that forms in the top of the foot. Press in slowly and hold.

Spleen 6 (S6)



Spleen 6 is another one of those points that is contraindicated in pregnancy but can be used after 38 weeks of pregnancy.

This point is an extremely powerful point to use to regulate hormones, stimulate contractions, and help dilate the cervix. Useful if the mother wants to avoid a medical induction of labor.

As outlined, this massage information is a helpful guide for both mother and her support people working together for a successful birth. I wish all involved a safe journey at this special time in your lives.

If you wish to discuss with me about the information of this booklet, please contact me via <http://www.calmconnexions.com.au> or call my Calm Connexions with Penny – Charlestown Studio (02) 49424207.

References:

Gaskin Ina May, 2003 : Ina May's Guide to Childbirth

Mother Touch TM,2009 : Mother Touch, Touch Techniques for Birth. DVD

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