

Birth Positions

Fortunately we've left behind the days of the woman laboring-on-her-back, the heavily sedated mother-to-be, totally dissociated from the natural workings of her own body and missing out on the joy of giving birth.

Today women can learn how to use their bodies to minimize discomfort and speed the progress of labor. Trying a variety of positions during labor and birth can help you to find what works best for you. Here is what you need to know about labor and birth positions.

STANDING

ADVANTAGES

- Excellent for oxygenation of fetus
- Uses gravity
- Contractions more effective
- Contractions less painful
- Helps speed up a "poky" labor
- Helps create good pushing urge

DISADVANTAGES

- Poor control at delivery
- Visualization very hard for birth attendant

WALKING

ADVANTAGES

- Uses gravity
- Contractions often less painful
- Encourages uterine contractility
- Baby well-aligned in pelvis
- May speed up labor
- Reduces backache
- Encourages descent

DISADVANTAGES

- Often not able to use if mother has high blood pressure
- Cannot be used with continuous electronic monitoring

SITTING

ADVANTAGES

- Good for resting
- Uses gravity
- Can be used with continuous electronic monitoring
- Can be used with birth ball to encourage descent
- Birth ball can be used when administering epidural

DISADVANTAGES

- May not be able to be used if mother has high blood pressure

SITTING ON TOILET

ADVANTAGES

- Helps relax perineum
- Mother is used to open-leg

position and pelvic pressure in this environment

Uses gravity

DISADVANTAGES

- Pressure from toilet seat may cause pain

SEMI-SITTING

ADVANTAGES

- Comfortable for mother
- Good use of gravity
- Good resting position
- Works well in hospital beds
- Good visibility at delivery for mom, dad and others present
- Good access to FHT's (fetal heart tones)

DISADVANTAGES

- Access to perineum can be poor
- Mobility of coccyx is impaired
- Some stress on perineum, but less than lithotomy

LITHOTOMY

on back, legs raised

DISADVANTAGES

- Compression of all major vessels
- Laceration or need for episiotomy is more likely
- No use of gravity to aid delivery

Avoid this position!

SIDE-LYING

ADVANTAGES

- Good fetal oxygenation
- Good resting position for mother
- Helpful if mother has elevated blood pressure
- Useful if mother has epidural anesthesia
- Often makes contractions more effective
- May promote progress of labor
- Easier for mom to relax between contractions during second stage
- Allows posterior sacral movement in second stage

- Can slow precipitous delivery
- Partner may need to support leg
- Partner can assist in delivery
- Lowers chance of laceration or need for episiotomy
- Access to perineum is excellent

DISADVANTAGES

- Access to FHT's poor if mother is lying on same side as baby's back
- No help from gravity
- If no one to hold leg, mother must support own leg under knee
- Mother may feel too passive

LEANING

ADVANTAGES

- Great for rotation of posterior presentation
- Uses gravity
- Can use with birth ball
- Contractions often less painful
- Contractions often more productive
- Baby is well-aligned in pelvis
- Relieves backache
- Facilitates use of back pressure
- May be more restful than standing

DISADVANTAGES

- Hard for attendant if used at delivery

KNEELING, leaning forward with support

ADVANTAGES

- Helpful with persistent posterior presentation
- Assists rotation of baby
- Good for pelvic rocking
- Good for use with birth ball
- Less strain on wrists and arms

SQUATTING

ADVANTAGES

- Encourages rapid descent

- Uses gravity
- May increase rotation of baby
- Allows freedom to shift weight for comfort
- Excellent for access to the perineum
- Excellent for fetal circulation
- May increase pelvis diameter by as much as two centimeters
- Requires less bearing-down effort
- Upper trunk presses on fundus to encourage descent
- Thighs keep baby well-aligned

DISADVANTAGES

- Often tiring to mother
- Sometimes hard to hear FHT's
- May be hard for mother to assist in delivery

HANDS AND KNEES

ADVANTAGES

- Good for bradycardia (low heart tones)
- Good for back labor
- Useful with birth ball
- Assists with rotation of posterior presentation
- Takes pressure off hemorrhoids
- Best position to avoid laceration or need for episiotomy
- Good delivery position for large baby
- Excellent for shoulder dystocia

DISADVANTAGES

- Hard to maintain eye contact with mother
- Hard for mother to see
- Baby must be passed through mother's legs
- Can be disorienting to inexperienced attendant.

PAULINA G. (POLLY) PEREZ, RN, BSN, LCCCE, FACCE, IS PRESIDENT OF C.F.E., INC., IN JOHNSON, VT. SHE IS A PERINATAL NURSE CONSULTANT, DOULA TRAINER AND MONITRICE IN PRIVATE PRACTICE.