

Supporting Yourself During Labor:

Non-Pharmacological Strategies

Disclaimer:

This information is intended for general educational purposes only and is not a substitute for medical advice. Please consult your healthcare provider for information specific to your personal health situation.

Labor and birth are intense, transformative experiences. While every person's journey is unique, many find comfort and strength in using non-medication-based strategies to manage the sensations of labor. These approaches support your nervous system, help you work with your body, and empower you to feel more in control.

Below are three key categories of strategies that can help support your comfort and coping during labor:

CREATING SAFETY AND CALMING THE NERVOUS SYSTEM

When your nervous system feels safe, your body is better able to rest between surges/waves, cope with intensity, and release hormones that support labor progression. These strategies help reduce fear and create a sense of calm:

- Identify your "Safe Environment" Cues:
 - Make a list of what makes you feel safe, calm, and grounded. Consider:
 - Lighting (dim or natural light)
 - Sounds (music, white noise, familiar voices)
 - Textures (soft blankets, your own pillow, cozy socks)
 - Smells (essential oils on a cotton pad—check with your birth setting for what's allowed)
 - Visual focal points
- Note What Feels Unsafe:
 - Identify any environmental or interpersonal factors that cause unease or tension and brainstorm ways to reduce or manage them.
- Rhythmic Movement and Breath:
 - Swaying, rocking, or gentle bouncing can signal safety to your nervous system.
- Neurotags – Pairing Sensory Cues with Relaxation:
 - Practice calming breathwork (e.g., diaphragmatic breathing or pelvic floor relaxation) while pairing it with the lighting, sounds, or textures you plan to use during labor. This helps create positive associations—what fires together, wires together.
- Language – being mindful of the language used to describe the birthing process can have an effect on some people's feelings of safety and comfort. Consider substituting words like "pain" for "intensity" or "contraction" for "surge" or "wave".

CHANGING THE SENSATION AT THE SOURCE

Bringing new input to the area where you're feeling discomfort can change how the brain interprets those signals:

- Massage (light or firm, based on preference - usually used for the back/hips)
- TENS Machine (electrical nerve stimulation on the lower back)
- Warm Water (shower or bath if available)
- Counterpressure (especially at the sacrum or hips, often applied by a birth partner)

CREATING A NEW SENSATION IN A DIFFERENT PART OF THE BODY

Sometimes, redirecting your brain's attention to a different, strong or soothing sensation elsewhere in your body can offer relief or distraction.

Consider:

- Squeezing a Wide-Tooth Comb during surges
- Holding an Ice Cube or placing cold washcloths on the forehead or neck
- Receiving Massage in other areas—shoulders, hands, feet—if these feel comforting
- Acupressure or Acupuncture (if a trained practitioner is present)