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“Training the mind for labor is similar to training the body—both require persistent and consistent effort.”
—*Simona Hadjigeorgalis, trainingforlabor.com*

Getting stronger

Conditioning your mind and body for labor now will prepare you for the big day later. **BY TRACY BROWN**

You use the drive-thru pharmacy to pick up your prenatal vitamins. You rely on an app to organize your weekly grocery list. You stream movies from the comfort of your sofa. Making things easy and convenient is your M.O., and it's not surprising that you'd like to take the same approach to childbirth. But how can you go about making L&D as painless as possible?

It turns out that there are a few techniques you can employ to ready your mind and body for the big day—you just have to be willing to put in the time and energy required up front. Choose to do it, though, and you'll reap the rewards of being prepared for one of your biggest (and most impressive) feats.

Bodybuilding

a regular fitness routine during pregnancy is beneficial. It's good for your heart and muscles and can relieve morning sickness, backaches, fatigue and constipation," says Koya Webb, internationally recognized holistic health and wellness expert and author of *Koya's Cuisine: Foods You Love That Love You Back!* "Some studies have shown that a regular fitness routine can even reduce your labor time," Webb adds that the sooner you start working out the easier it will be to maintain your regimen during and after pregnancy for an easier recovery.

So what should a soon-to-be mama do to up the chances of ease on delivery day? "Walking is a great exercise that all moms-to-be can do to stay fit," says Webb, "and swimming and water aerobics are great ways to recover when feeling sore or stressed in any part of the body." To target

Mamaste

Yoga is not only a healthy life practice for all women, it can also aid in labor and delivery. "Movements specific to yoga and breathing techniques can be used to manage pain and stress during labor," says Skila Ramirez, 500 E-RYT, senior trainer for YogaFit Training Systems worldwide. "During the labor and delivery process, we may begin to focus more on the discomfort or pain, and this causes more discomfort and pain. By focusing on our breath or movement, attention is diverted." Here are some other ways Ramirez says yoga can mentally and physically aid during pregnancy and delivery:

EASE MOOD SWINGS: During pregnancy, hormones can shift causing an array of emotions. Yoga can be used to ease mood swings through self-awareness.

ENCOURAGE DIGESTION AND ELIMINATION: As our bodies change and adapt, so too does organ function. Constipation is a common side effect of prenatal vitamins with added iron. Specific movements in yoga can facilitate digestion and elimination.

REDUCE SWELLING: Certain movements and postures can increase circulation to reduce swelling and water retention, most commonly in the ankles, hands and face.

IMPROVE POSTURE AND JOINT STABILITY: Many poses promote joint stability and good posture which is necessary with weight distribution on the spine shifting and elevated relaxin levels causing instability in the pelvic and low back region.

MINIMIZE STRESS: Perhaps yoga is most known for its effectiveness in managing stress and reducing the production of stress hormones.

INCREASE ENERGY: The added fatigue that comes with pregnancy can make getting through a workday tough. Learning to breathe efficiently for your lung capacity can give you an added boost.

workouts, tailor's and goddess poses common in yoga—to find one or two that are comfortable for you.

Get in my belly

We've all heard the phrase "you are what you eat," right? Well, that rings true for both you and baby during pregnancy. Think about Newton's third law of motion (for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction) in terms of nutrition: If you eat a healthy diet before and during pregnancy, you and your baby will inevitably handle the labor process better than if you spend nine months downing Häagen-Dazs and guzzling lattes. Before conception, a prenatal multi-vitamin and multimineral supplement are important; after conception, beginning in your second trimester, it's essential to add an additional 300 (nutrient dense) calories to help support baby's growth, says Webb,

who adds that it is healthy to gain 25 to 35 pounds of baby weight per your doctor's recommendation.

A real key player for delivery day, though, is hydration.

"Hydration is very important and women should strive for a gallon of lemon water a day," says Webb.

To be at your best for labor, she suggests eliminating alcohol and coffee (or at least cutting back to one cup of decaf a day) for the duration of pregnancy.

Webb also advises that you start thinking about the food you're going to eat around the big day. "A week before delivery, start freezing bananas, berries and other fruit so that at any time you can make yourself a quick smoothie," says Webb. "Soak two to four cups of nuts and seeds to keep in the refrigerator or dehydrate. These nuts and seeds make great sauces, dips and pâtés that can easily be transferred to containers for a quick meal or snack." She adds that it's also good to keep a variety of veggies chopped and refrigerated for on-the-go salads or veggie bowls.

Mind control

As important as it is to strengthen your muscles and feed your body the proper nutrients to prepare for a healthy delivery, it's equally as important to get your mind to the correct place. "Any endurance event requires physical conditioning as well as mental fortitude," says Simona Hadjigeorgalis, mentor, fitness expert and owner of trainingforlabor.com. "There's a saying in sports training that applies equally well to childbirth: The mind will be willing

check it twice

Use this list to make sure you have everything lined up for D-day, so you can spend your time concentrating on conquering physical and mental demands.

Birthing staff. Assembling a caring and considerate team of people to support you on delivery day is one of the most important things to take care of before go time.

Birth plan. Write down your birth preferences to inform your birthing team of your wants and wishes and avoid being bothered while in the throes of labor.

Pain management. Tub of water? Cherry popsicles? Massage? Epidural? Whatever you are using to combat the pains of labor, make sure you've researched all aspects before delivery.

Birth class. Taking a class is one of the best ways to prepare for the experience. You will learn techniques for breathing, pain management and tips for pushing. Find the best fit for you by visiting [The International Childbirth Education Association at icaea.org](http://TheInternationalChildbirthEducationAssociation.org).

Pack your bag. Preparing your labor bag ahead of time will ease stress and ensure you have everything you need on hand.

your body and your mind with each train milestone you achieve. The same concept can be applied to getting ready for labor a delivery," says Hadjigeorgalis.

How do we engage our minds to step to the plate? Hadjigeorgalis suggests incorporating mental exercises and positive thinking practices. "First, condition your to trust in the wisdom of your human vehicle," she says. You can do this by writing down important phrases and reciting the each day throughout your pregnancy. She recommends using mantras like "My body is a healthy vessel for life" or "I was designed to bring life into this world."

Second, she advises deeply focusing on your breath for five minutes at least twice a week. Make note of the cadence of your breath, how your chest moves, and how oxygen feels traveling through your body. "This simple exercise will help you develop a conscious connection to the power available in the everyday act of breathing," she explains. Lastly, "Train with a 'why,'" Hadjigeorgalis says, advising moms-to-be to have clear reasons for training for labor (it helps to write them down) so they're able to keep up the momentum week after week.

Sweet slumber

Another way to aid both your mind and body in labor day prep is simply to sleep. (Seriously!) "When mom is well rested, she is more physically and mentally prepared for labor," says Mary Oscategui, maternal and child sleep consultant, founder of the International Maternity Institute and co-founder of the Association of Professional Sleep Consultants. "Sleep greatly diminishes the risk of any complications during and after labor," adds Oscategui, who notes that some studies have linked the amount of sleep in late pregnancy with labor duration and type. "Sleep helps to balance stress hormones," she says, which can otherwise affect the labor process by delaying or extending labor.

But what should you do if insomnia's got you up at all hours? Oscategui recommends employing tactics like keeping the room dark and cool (between 68 and 72 degrees), keeping a journal close by, and removing electronic devices from the room. She also counsels all moms to speak to their physician to help decipher true insomnia from normal pregnancy sleep woes.

By being proactive in preparing your body for the process of labor, you will be strong and smartly fit for the exhilaration that

Turn to page 74 for a list of the most common sleep zappers.

Everyone keeps talking to me about practicing my Kegels, but do they really work?

Yes! Kegels really work! All women should do Kegels two to three times a day to strengthen the pelvic floor, which helps push the baby out and prevent vaginal tears. Even before pregnancy and after the birth of the baby, practicing Kegels regularly strengthens your pelvic muscles for