

“Things you can do at childbirth” Aid



To determine how you experience childbirth and
how to relieve labor pain in your own way

~To convey how you want to experience childbirth~



There are several options for relieving pain (labor pain) during childbirth, each with its own advantages and disadvantages. This aid is designed for those who are about to give birth; learn about the different ways to relieve labor pain, choose the method that best suits you from various options, and determine how you experience childbirth in your own way. We will help you think about a birth plan and make decisions that are best for you.

※ “Aid” means a supporting document to help you make decisions.

This document introduces options for treatment and testing, and explains the advantages and disadvantages of these options from a neutral standpoint in an easy-to-understand manner so that patients can understand the different options available and understand the results of their choice. This is an essentially tool to help clarify your choices.⁴⁾

***A “Birth Plan” is a plan made by expectant mothers (with input from families) who are about to give birth, in order to have a safe and satisfying birth. It is the process of sharing their intentions and values for delivery methods, how they wish to experience childbirth, what nursing care they would like to receive during and after childbirth, and their expectations of childcare provided by medical professionals such as midwives from conception, providing sufficient explanation and consent about the decisions made.¹⁾ It is said that understanding and thinking about a birth plan may support women to take initiative during childbirth to increase their satisfaction with the experience.^{2) 3)}**



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About “Things you can do at childbirth” Aid



There are various options for how a woman can experience childbirth (birth plan). This Aid is designed for women who are planning to have a vaginal delivery, so they can think about how to relieve pain during childbirth with assistance from medical professionals and their families, and how they want to experience childbirth (birth plan).

This Aid is written to follow four steps. When reading the Aid for the first time, please read it step-by-step from the beginning.

STEP 1 Knowing how to make informed decisions

P. 1 ~ 3



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Explanation of words used in this Aid

Here is a list of terms that appear in this Aid that may require additional explanation. For the words marked with an asterisk (*) in the text, please refer to the "Explanation of words" in the table below.

Terms	Explanation
vaginal delivery	A method of delivery in which the baby passes through the birth canal and is born through the vagina.
instrumental delivery	A method of childbirth that uses an instrument to assist with the birth of a baby. Refers to vacuum extraction* or forceps delivery* ¹⁾
suction delivery	A delivery method in which a silicon or metal suction cup is attached to the baby's head and suction pressure is applied to pull out the entire baby's body during an assisted birth. ¹⁾
forceps delivery	A delivery method in which the baby's head is held between two large spoon-like forceps and the entire baby's body is pulled out during an assisted birth. ¹⁾

perineal laceration An injury to the mother that occurs when the baby's head or body passes through the perineum (from the vulva to the anus) during delivery, and is classified as 1st to 4th degree.¹⁾

- 1st degree laceration : Damage to perineal skin and vaginal wall mucosa.

- 2nd degree laceration : Tears involving muscle layers as well as skin of the perineum, but not reaching the anal sphincter.

- 3rd degree laceration : A laceration that reaches the anal sphincter or vaginal-rectal septum but does not damage the rectal mucosa.

- 4th degree laceration : Laceration with damage to the anal or rectal mucosa in addition to the 3rd degree laceration.

perineal incision It is performed by a medical professional according to the necessity and urgency for the purpose of avoiding perineal laceration during delivery or when the baby needs to be delivered immediately. It is done using medical scissors to make an incision in the perineum (between the vagina and the anus) as the baby's head pushes the opening of the vagina.²⁾

STEP I Knowing how to make informed decisions

How to use “Things you can do at childbirth” Aid

Let's find out if this Aid is helpful for you.

This Aid does not endorse any particular choice of options. This booklet provides information for expectant mothers to learn about the different ways to relieve labor pain, enables them to choose from a variety of options to relieve labor pain that best suits them, and learn how to experience childbirth in their own way (Birth Plan) by helping them make informed decision. You can use it when thinking about your birth plan, together with your doctor, midwife, and family.

This Aid was created for the following women who:

- ☐ plan to have a vaginal delivery
- ☐ plan to have a spontaneous delivery
- ☐ plan to use epidural anesthesia
- ☐ are hesitant about choosing spontaneous delivery or use epidural anesthesia



This Aid is not for women experiencing the following conditions:

Women requiring an in-person consultation with a doctor

- ☐ Women who have been recommended to have a Caesarean section by doctors



STEP I Knowing how to make informed decisions

How do you want to experience childbirth?

※how to experience childbirth (Birth Plan) : Delivery methods, pain management in childbirth (Labor Pain Relief)

To be satisfied with your childbirth experience, it is important to choose your own way of making decisions.

There are generally three options for decision-making.

1

I want to decide by myself, after being provided with sufficient information.

2

I want to decide while being supported by medical professionals and my family, as we share information together.

3

I want someone else to decide for me (e.g., doctor, midwife, or family member).

What role would you like to play in deciding?

- ☐ I want to decide by myself, after being provided with sufficient information.
- ☐ I want to decide while being supported by medical professionals and my family , as we share information together.

If either or both of the options above apply to you, this Aid will help you.

Let' s move on.

Those who chose option “3. I want someone else to decide for me (e.g., doctor, midwife, or family member)” , the information included in this Aid may not be for you.

You can use this Aid if you want to confirm whether other people's decisions are right for you, and when you want to reflect on the care received after

STEP I Knowing how to make informed decisions

giving birth.

This Aid provides you with information and a space where you can record your thoughts and wishes, which can be used for discussion with others.

Reading

Know / Compare / Think



Writing

Mark / Make notes about your birth plan



Using for Discussion

Convey your wishes / Ask questions / Make a decision with someone else



<Preparation for using this Aid>

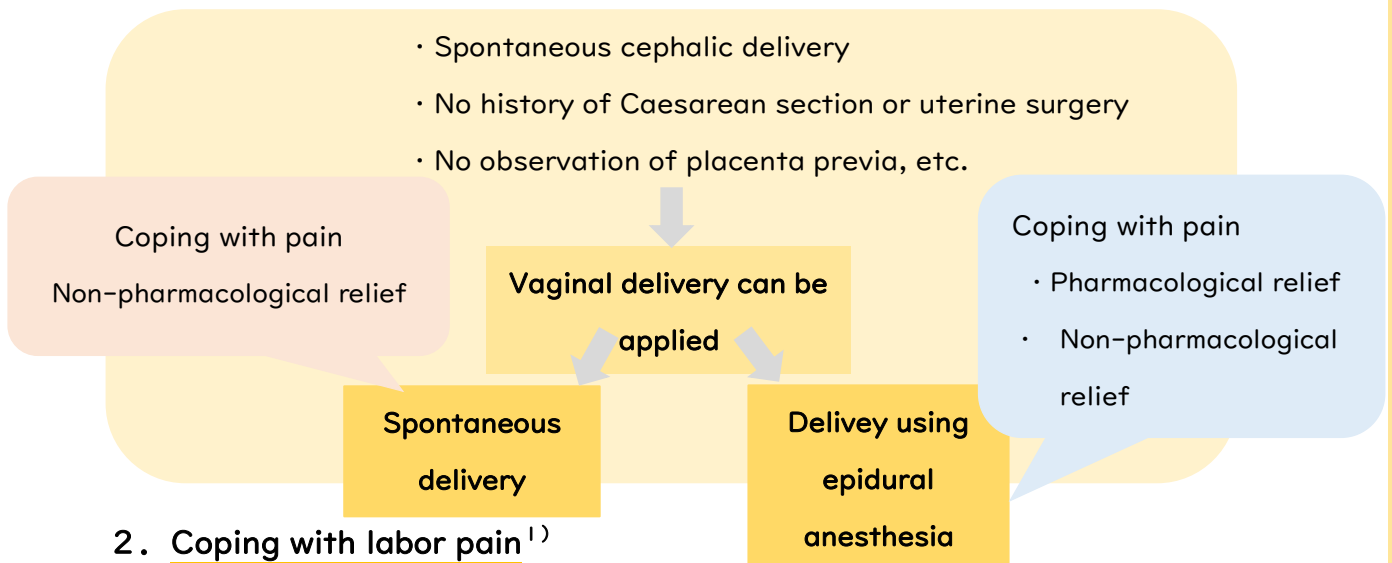
- ◆ Approximately 30 minutes is required to read through this Aid.
- ◆ Please have something to write with in case you want take a notes.

STEP 2: Learning the pros and cons of each option

Before thinking about how you want to experience childbirth (birth plan) ~Basic knowledge of vaginal delivery~

This Aid focuses on giving women the choice about how they want to experience childbirth and pain relief during labor accompanied by a vaginal delivery.

1. Vaginal delivery method¹⁾



2. Coping with labor pain¹⁾

● Labor pain relief during spontaneous delivery

Spontaneous delivery is a natural method of childbirth without the use of anesthetics during labor. There are methods to reduce the pain associated with labor pain, such as massage, acupressure, and warming the painful area. By working on the pain circuit, the pain associated with labor pain is alleviated.

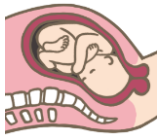





● Labor pain relief using epidural anesthesia

Epidural anesthesia is a way to relieve labor pain. When the pain associated with labor becomes strong, at the request of the woman, a thin tube called a catheter is inserted into the epidural space near the spinal cord in the lower back and a local anesthetic is injected to reduce labor pain. The injected anesthetic acts on the nerves around the epidural space, blocking the pain-transmitting nerves to the uterus, vagina, vulva, and perineum to reduce the pain associated with labor.

STEP 2: Learning the pros and cons of each option

- ✧ Even during spontaneous childbirth, anesthesia can be used to alleviate pain when suturing a perineal incision* and perineal laceration*.

3. Birth process and progress^{1) 2)}

	1st stage of Labor			2nd stage of Labor	3rd stage of Labor
Time required	<p>< primiparous woman > 10-12 hours</p> <p>< multiparous woman > 4-6 hours</p>			2-3 hours	15-30 min
Labor pains	Regular pain within 10 min. Menstrual-like pain gradually getting stronger	5-6 min intervals Lower abdomen and lower back pain getting stronger	2-3 min intervals, pressure on the anus, strain starts	1-2 min intervals, according to contractions, keep straining	Weaker uterine contractions
Cervical dilation	0-3 cm 	4-7 cm 	8-10 cm 	Maximum (10 cm)  Baby arrived 	Expelled placenta 

- In the case of a vaginal delivery, when labor begins, the uterus receives commands from the brain, and the uterine muscles repeatedly contract and rest. Due to contractions, the cervix, which is about 0 cm dilated initially, gradually dilates to 10 cm. The baby gradually descends down the birth canal. This process is common during spontaneous delivery and epidural-used delivery.
- As labor progresses, your midwife will say, “Let’s try pushing” as the uterus contracts. You should keep straining (pushing) according to the contractions. The baby travels further down the birth canal as a result of the mother's contractions and pushing.

STEP 2: Learning the pros and cons of each option

- When the baby's head becomes visible, you stop straining and switch to short exhalations. After a while, the baby will be born.
- After the baby is born, weaker contractions start in 5–20 minutes. Childbirth completes when the placenta is expelled.



4. To facilitate a smooth childbirth experience^{2) 3)}

There are four important factors to facilitate childbirth and they work with each other.

① Contractions

Contractions are the force (repeated contractions and relaxations of the uterus) that pushes the baby out. Contractions cause the cervix to dilate and the baby to descend. Contractions occur in a regular rhythm. One contraction becomes longer and stronger and the interval between contractions becomes shorter as labor progresses.

However, the contraction (labor pain) of the uterus does not last forever; there is always a rest period after each one.

There are individual differences in the cycle and duration of contractions, but it is said that it takes an average of 11–15 hours for first-time mothers and 6–8 hours for multiparous mothers from the time of regular contractions to the baby's birth.

② Birth canal

The birth canal is the passage through which the baby passes during birth. The birth canal consists of the bony birth canal (the pelvis) and the soft birth canal (the vagina and pelvic floor muscles). It is important that the baby passes down the birth canal as smoothly as possible. If the baby's head is large compared to the size of the pelvis, labor may be difficult.

STEP 2: Learning the pros and cons of each option

③ Baby

In order to pass through the narrow birth canal, the baby moves down the birth canal little by little, by overlapping the joints of the skull bones to make the head as small as possible and also by rotating its head and body.

④ Relaxation/rest

Relaxation is important during labor. Between contractions, the pain eases. When the pain eases, try to relax as much as possible. If the tension continues, the mother's body may become stiff and the baby may find it difficult to move down the birth canal. In contrast, when the mother is relaxed, the baby receives more oxygen and stays healthy.

5. Comparison of advantages and disadvantages of labor pain relief methods

Let's compare the advantages and disadvantages of labor pain relief methods. By comparing them side-by-side, it becomes easier to understand the advantages and disadvantages of each one, as well as their similarities and differences.

How you spend your time and labor pain relief methods	Advantages	Disadvantages
I would like to move freely *Column : Give birth in my preferred position⇒	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Shortens delivery time• Labor progresses faster• Decreases possibility of Cesarean section• Fewer days for baby to	No adverse effects reported on mother and/or baby

STEP 2: Learning the pros and cons of each option

Refer to page 17 for advantages and disadvantages of various birth positions	spend in the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU)	
Massage • acupressure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relieves labor pain • Have a positive birth experience • Gain a sense of control over childbirth • Reduces anxiety during childbirth 	No adverse effects reported on mother and/or baby
Warm the body 1. Soak in a hot bath 2. Apply hot compresses, warm up with warmers, hot packs, and hot water bottles	1. Soak in a hot bath <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relieves labor pain • Less chance of perineal laceration* 2. Apply hot compresses <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relieves labor pain • Shortens delivery time 	No adverse effects reported on mother and/or baby
Aromatherapy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some aroma oils are said to have sedative and labor-promoting effects, but there are no studies on their effects on labor pain relief or on the progress of labor 	No adverse effects reported on mother and/or baby
Acupuncture • Shiatsu	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increases satisfaction with labor pain relief 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparations such as consultation before

STEP 2: Learning the pros and cons of each option

		<p>childbirth are necessary</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No adverse effects reported on mother and/or baby
<p>Relaxation</p> <p>1. Maternity yoga</p> <p>2. Listen to music</p> <p>3. Focus on breathing</p>	<p>1. Maternity yoga</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relieves labor pain • Increases satisfaction with labor pain relief • Shortens delivery time • Increases satisfaction with childbirth experience <p>2. Listen to music</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relieves labor pain • Reduces anxiety during childbirth <p>3. Focus on breathing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relieves labor pain • Gives your baby sufficient oxygen 	<p>No adverse effects reported on mother and/or baby</p>
<p>*Column : Having your preferred support person with you during labor</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increases the chance of having a spontaneous vaginal delivery • Decreases the possibility of a Cesarean section 	<p>No adverse effects reported on mother and/or baby by providing “continuous support during</p>

STEP 2: Learning the pros and cons of each option

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decreases the possibility of instrument-assisted delivery* • Decreases the possibility of epidural anesthesia use • Increases the possibility of having a positive birth experience • Increases the possibility of decreasing signs of distress for the baby 	childbirth”
<p>Epidural :</p> <p>Anesthesia is used to reduce the pain associated with childbirth</p> <p>★Please learn more about the advantages and disadvantages of an epidural in the “ Informational decision aid about childbirth with or without epidural anesthesia” , which is available via a QR code listed on P. 32.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More reliable labor pain relief • Some non-pharmacological labor pain relief methods can be used together with an epidural. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Side-effects from pain relievers may be present • Some non-pharmacological labor pain relief methods cannot be selected



STEP 2: Learning the pros and cons of each option

Dealing with pain during childbirth ~non-pharmacological labor pain relief methods~

As a response to the pain associated with childbirth (labor pain), the following methods are mainly used in Japan as non-pharmacological labor pain relief methods that do not use anesthesia:

- Move freely during labor · Give birth in my preferred position
- Massage · Acupressure
- Soak in a hot bath (Soak in a hot water, hot compress)
- Aromatherapy
- Acupuncture · Shiatsu
- Relaxation (Maternity yoga, Listening to music, Breathing)



<Points to keep in mind when reading this Aid>

The pain relief methods mentioned here may or may not be available depending on the location or facility where you give birth. If you have any preferences and concerns, please check with your midwife or doctor at the birthing site.

- ◆ Non-pharmacological pain relief methods such as, massage, aromatherapy, relaxation and continuous support during childbirth are methods of pain relief that can be implemented even after an epidural. You may have a more comfortable experience during labor if you incorporate some of these methods in conjunction with an epidural.

STEP 2: Learning the pros and cons of each option

Move freely during labor



What is this method like?

Choose a birth position you feel comfortable with and move freely during the 1st stage of labor.

Advantage of: “move freely during labor” ^{1) 2) 3)}

- ☐ It may shorten the duration of the 1st stage of labor
 - During the 1st stage of labor, staying upright and moving freely is more effective in promoting labor than lying down.¹⁾
- ☐ Decreases the possibility of having a cesarean section
- ☐ Decreases the possibility of having to use epidural anesthesia
- ☐ Fewer days for a baby to spend in the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU)

Disadvantage of : “move freely during labor” ³⁾

No adverse effects reported on mother and/or baby.

<Birth position and how to spend the 1st stage of labor>

- ◆ 「Midwifery guidelines for pregnant women and their families」 recommend that women in childbirth spend their time in an upright position that is comfortable for them, rather than spending long periods of time lying on your back or on your side in bed.¹⁾
- ◆ Specifically, it involves sitting, standing, kneeling, on all fours, walking, squatting, swinging, leaning, etc. You should feel free to move around.¹⁾

STEP 2: Learning the pros and cons of each option



Point 1 「Various birth positions」



Crossed-leg position



Supported squat



Sitting cowboy style



Sitting in a reclining chair



Kneeling with a chair



On hands and knees



Sitting upright on a balance ball



Standing forward lean over a table



Standing, lean back on someone



Standing with knees bent



Standing holding onto the wall



Kneeling, lean over someone



- Examples of birth positions are shown above. You can spend time in various positions.

STEP 2: Learning the pros and cons of each option

- Movement may be limited by medical procedures or the use of epidural anesthesia.

Talk to your midwife or doctor at the birthing site for more information.

Point 2 「Actions to facilitate labor」



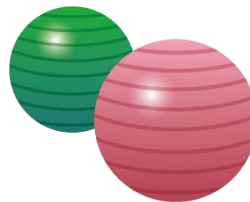
- Because a baby is pulled down by the force of gravity, in addition to the contractions, birth positions and movements such as squatting, sitting, and standing facilitate childbirth.
- When walking using long strides while raising the thighs, performing squats, and rotating the hips, the muscles of the hip joints, pelvis, and lower body are relaxed. This makes it easier for the birth canal to open up, and the force of gravity makes it easier for the baby to descend.

Point 3 「Items that are useful for several birth positions 」

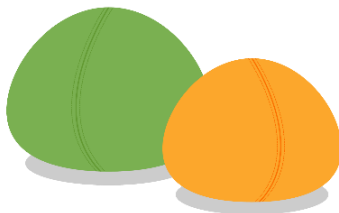
Active chair⁴⁾



Balance ball



Beaded cushion



Pillow/Cushio



STEP 2: Learning the pros and cons of each option

- These items are often found at birthing facilities. It is important to use a birth position that you feel most comfortable with, using various items as needed.
- Depending on the progress of labor, you may be advised by medical professionals such as midwives on "birth positions and movements to proceed with childbirth."

STEP 2: Learning the pros and cons of each option

Column

Give birth in my preferred position

What is this method like?

After understanding the advantages and disadvantages of various birth positions, at the time of childbirth, we recommend that you take the position that you feel most comfortable with.

1)

Birth positions can involve lying on your back, lying on your side, on all fours, kneeling, sitting, standing, squatting, etc.

Birth positions

- 「Midwifery guidelines for pregnant women and their families」 recommend that women should understand the advantages and disadvantages of each birth position and take a position that is most comfortable for childbirth.
- It also suggests avoiding as much as possible lying on the back during the 2nd stage of labor, or staying in a nearly supine position.¹⁾
- However, depending on the health condition of the mother and baby, the situation at the time of delivery, and the environment of the facility where the delivery takes place, there is a possibility that the birth position during delivery may be restricted.

STEP 2: Learning the pros and cons of each option

Birth positions	Advantage	Disadvantage
Sitting, kneeling, squatting, or lying down	Decrease possibility of instrument delivery* Less chance of perineal laceration* Increase the possibility of decreased signs of distress in the baby	Increase of 2nd degree perineal laceration* Increase possibility of bleeding over 500 ml
Delivery chair (Stool)	Less chance of perineal laceration *	Increase of 2nd degree perineal laceration*
Lying down	No difference in delivery time for the 2nd stage of labor, delivery methods, and the possibility of perineal laceration	

※ Table reproduced from Midwifery Guidelines Instructional Manual, Japan Academy of Midwifery Working Group (2022). Figure reproduced from Midwifery Guidelines for Pregnant Women and Their Family (2021). pp. 57

Massage · Acupressure



What is this method like ?

During childbirth, the person who accompanies you massages according to the mother's wishes and uses the method (areas and strength) that she prefers.

STEP 2: Learning the pros and cons of each option

Benefits of getting “a massage” during childbirth^{1) 2) 4)}

- ☐ May reduce labor discomfort and ease labor pains
- ☐ Increase the possibility of having a positive birth experience
 - More likely to be satisfied with and positively evaluate childbirth experiences
- ☐ Increase chances of gaining a sense of control over childbirth
 - Experience less out-of-control feelings during labor and delivery
- ☐ May reduce anxiety during childbirth

Disadvantage of getting “a massage” during childbirth²⁾

No adverse effects reported on mother and/or baby

※Although massage for labor pain relief is unlikely to be harmful, its beneficial effects are still being researched and certainty of evidence is low¹⁾

<Effect of massage³⁾>

- ◆ By massaging the pain areas and stiff muscles, blood circulation is improved and muscle tension is relieved.
- ◆ By rubbing the areas of tension and being spoken to, anxiety and tension about childbirth are eased and psychological relaxation is promoted.
- ◆ A relaxed state is said to have the effect of facilitating childbirth.

STEP 2: Learning the pros and cons of each option



Point 1 「How to provide massage・acupressure」 3)

Who is a provider of massage and acupressure?

People who are present at childbirth, midwives who attend to assist with the birth, etc.

<Massage>

Area : Areas where labor pains are felt, areas where muscles are tense, areas where you want to be massaged.

As labor progresses, the area where you feel pain will go down and the range will increase.

◆ Method :

It is effective to massage slowly with warm hands and large movements in accordance with the woman's breathing.

<Acupressure>

Area : Areas where labor pains are felt, pressure points for relieving pain, pressure points for promoting childbirth

Areas such as the anal area where women in childbirth experience pressure.

As labor progresses, you will feel pressure on the anal area and feel a need to push (feeling of straining). If you feel a sense of straining, application of pressure to slowly push up the anus according to your breathing will help.

◆ Method :

Gently apply pressure to the painful area with a warm hand according to woman's breathing. This should be applied while confirming the degree

STEP 2: Learning the pros and cons of each option

Point 2 「What can be prepared beforehand」^{3) 4)}

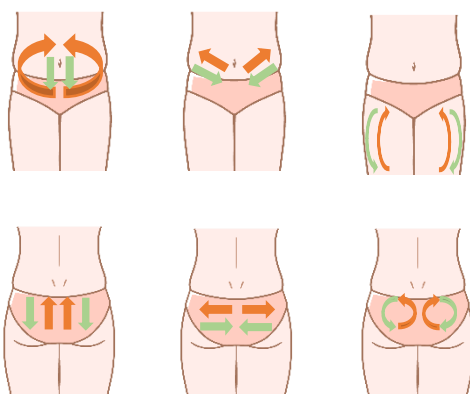
<Items used for massage・acupressure>

- Tennis ball □ Pressure points equipment □ Massage oil, etc.
- ◆ A tennis ball or pressure points equipment are useful when performing the compression method.
- ◆ It is a good idea to prepare the massage oil that you use on a regular basis, as it can be used for massage during childbirth.

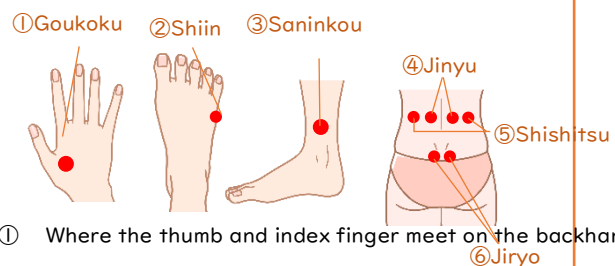


<Areas where massage・acupressure can be applied>

- ◆ Illustrations below show the areas and methods of massaging, the abdomen and lower back, as well as pressure points to relieve pain during childbirth.
- ◆ Please check the areas and methods with those who will be present at the birth



Massage technique
during labor



- ① Where the thumb and index finger meet on the backhand
- ② outside nail base of little toe
- ③ About 4 fingers above the inner ankle
- ④ 2 finger widths left and right from the spine at the height of the hipbone
- ⑤ Left and right outside 2 finger width from Jinyu
- ⑥ Second depression from the top of sacrum

Pressure points that
relieve pain

STEP 2: Learning the pros and cons of each option

Warm the body

1. Soaking in hot water



According to research results, a cold sensitivity causes weak labor pains and the possibility of protracted labor (prolonged childbirth) increases.⁸⁾⁹⁾ Keeping your body warm during labor may prevent these situations.

What is this method like?

For pain relief and relaxation in the 1st stage of labor, you can choose to soak in hot water.

※However, depending on the health condition of the mother and baby and the circumstances of childbirth, this may not be recommended.

Benefits of “soaking in hot water” during labor^{1) 2) 3)}

- ☐ Soaking in a hot water during the 1st labor stage possibly relieves labor pains.
- ☐ It is reported that hot water bathing later during labor (cervical dilation >5 cm) is more effective in relieving labor pain earlier on in labor (cervical dilation <5 cm).³⁾
- ☐ Decrease the possibility of epidural anesthesia use.
- ☐ Less chance of perineal laceration*.
- ☐ No reports of adverse effects on babies.

Disadvantages of “soaking in hot water” during labor³⁾

No adverse effects reported on mother and/or baby.

<Important point when soaking in hot water>

- ◆ If your water has broken, you should not bathe in hot water, as bathing increases the risk of infecting your baby. In such cases, you can warm your body with foot baths or hot compresses.



STEP 2: Learning the pros and cons of each option



What is this method like?

Warming yourself with a hot pack or hot water bottle is called the hot compress method. Hot compresses may relieve labor pain when it is applied to the labor pain area.

Benefits of using a “hot compress” during labor⁴⁾ ⁵⁾

- ☐ Applying hot compresses may relieve labor pains
- ☐ Applying hot compresses possibly shortens delivery time.

Disadvantage of using a “hot compress” during labor⁵⁾

No adverse effects were reported on mother and/or baby.

※Although hot compress use for labor pain relief is unlikely to be harmful, its beneficial effects are still being researched and certainty of evidence is low. ⁴⁾

2. Hot compress (warmers, hot packs, and hot water bottles)

<How to use hot compresses and its effects>

- ◆ Hot compress works to: (1) increase blood flow; and (2) relax muscles. By improving blood circulation, more blood flows to the uterus, and the body becomes relaxed, which has the effect of relieving labor pain and promoting childbirth. ⁶⁾
- ◆ There are various ways to use hot compresses, but by wearing socks or leg warmers that you normally use, you can easily warm your body. ⁷⁾
- ◆ Depending on where you give birth, you may be able to use a hot pack to apply a hot compress.
- ※ In the case of epidural use, the hot compress method cannot be used because skin sensation is dulled by anesthesia.

STEP 2: Learning the pros and cons of each option

Aromatherapy



What is this method like?

Aromatherapy is a therapy that heals mental and physical disorders and helps maintain health by using essential oils produced from plants.¹⁾

Benefits of “aromatherapy” during labor²⁾

- ☐ There are essential oils that are said to have sedative and labor-promoting effects, but there are no studies on their effects on labor pain relief or the progress of labor.
- ☐ The use of aromatherapy has not been shown to make a difference to the effectiveness of pharmacological labor pain relief (epidural anesthesia).

<How to use aromatherapy>

- ◆ Add a few drops of essential oil when bathing or to a foot bath, or place some on a towel or tissue and keep it nearby, or dilute it with a carrier oil (vegetable oil) and use it in a treatment (massage) to enhance the aroma. Aroma balances mind and body through diffusion and inhalation.¹⁾
- ◆ Aromatherapy can be used to relieve minor ailments such as morning sickness from early pregnancy onwards.¹⁾ There are some essential oils that promote labor and some that cannot be used by pregnant women depending on the stage of pregnancy. Consult with the midwife at the birth site before using aromatherapy oils.

STEP 2: Learning the pros and cons of each option

<Effects of aromatherapy^{1) 3)}>

- Sedation · Relaxation : Lavender, sweet orange, cypress, ylang-ylang, etc.
- Labor promotion : Clary sage, jasmine, rose, clove

- Acupuncture · Shiatsu



What is this method like?

At the time of childbirth, with the aim of starting natural contractions and relieving labor pains, apply acupuncture and Shiatsu on acupuncture points (acupuncture points).

Benefits of “Acupuncture and Shiatsu” during labor^{1) 2) 3)}

- ☐ Increase satisfaction with labor pain relief.
- ☐ Decrease the possibility of epidural anesthesia use
- ※ All studies conducted so far are small in scale; therefore, further investigation is needed, including the adverse effects on mothers and babies.

Disadvantage of “Acupuncture and Shiatsu” during labor²⁾

- ☐ Counseling before childbirth is needed.
- No adverse effects were reported on mother and/or baby.

STEP 2: Learning the pros and cons of each option

<Information about Acupuncture · Shiatsu>

- ◆ Acupuncture has been used for a long time in Asia, such as in China, South Korea, and Japan. In Japan, a nationally certified acupuncturist inserts thin metal needles into the correct acupuncture points and stimulates the acupuncture points to cure illness.¹⁾
 - ◆ Shiatsu is a method of pressing acupuncture points on the body with the hands or fingers and stimulating the same points as acupuncture. There are two types of Shiatsu: those performed by a nationally certified “Anma-massage Shiatsu practitioner” and those performed by individuals as self-massage.¹⁾
- Acupuncture may not be available depending on the facility at the birth site. Counseling with midwives before childbirth is recommended.

STEP 2: Learning the pros and cons of each option

Relaxation (Yoga · Music · Breathing)



1. Incorporating maternity yoga

What is this method like?

Incorporating maternity yoga poses and breathing techniques during childbirth encourages relaxation.

Benefits of “incorporating maternity yoga” during childbirth^{1) 2)}

- ☐ Increase the possibility to relieve labor pain
- ☐ May increase satisfaction with labor pain relief
- ☐ May shorten delivery time
- ☐ May increase satisfaction with childbirth experience

Disadvantage of incorporating “maternity yoga” during childbirth²⁾

No adverse effects reported on mother and/or baby.

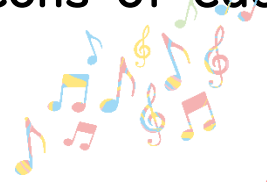
※Although yoga for relaxation is unlikely to be harmful, its beneficial effects are still being researched and certainty of evidence is low.¹⁾

<Preparation during pregnancy>

- ◆ If you have been doing maternity yoga since you were pregnant, you may be able to spend your time in a more relaxed state by practicing yoga and the breathing technique during childbirth.
- ◆ If you wish to use yoga during childbirth, it is recommended that you to familiarize yourself with the poses and breathing methods of maternity yoga during pregnancy because then it will be easier to incorporate it during childbirth.

STEP 2: Learning the pros and cons of each option

2. Listening to music



What is this method like?

Listening to music during childbirth promotes relaxation.
Music that women feel comfortable with can be used during labor.

Benefits of “listening to music” during childbirth^{1) 2)}

- ☐ May relieve labor pain
- ☐ May reduce anxiety during childbirth

Disadvantage of “listening to music” during childbirth²⁾

No adverse effects reported on mother and/or baby.

※Although music for relaxation is unlikely to be harmful, its beneficial effects are still being researched and certainty of evidence is low.¹⁾

<Preparation during pregnancy>

- ◆ We recommend music that you can relax to, music that will motivate you to keep going, and music that you have been accustomed to listening to throughout your pregnancy.
- ◆ If you bring in a CD or music playlist that you used throughout your pregnancy, you may be able to use it at the birth site.
- ◆ In some cases, music to be played during childbirth is prepared at the birth site.
- ◆ If you have some music of choice that you would like to use, talk to the midwife at the birth site when discussing your birth plan.

STEP 2: Learning the pros and cons of each option

3. Focus on breathing



What is this method like?

By practicing the breathing method at the time of childbirth, you will be able to relax and relieve the pain of childbirth.

Benefits of “Focus on breathing” during childbirth^{1) 2)}

- ☐ May relieve labor pain early in the 1st stage of labor
- ☐ Gives your baby sufficient oxygen

Disadvantage of “Focus on breathing” during childbirth²⁾

No adverse effects reported on mother and/or baby.

※Although breathing for relaxation is unlikely to be harmful, its beneficial effects are still being researched and certainty of evidence is low.¹⁾

<Preparation during pregnancy~breathing exercises~^{3) 4)}>

- ◆ In the early stage of the 1st stage of labor: contractions are short and weak.

This stage allows the woman in labor to breathe in a way that is easy for her to control the pain.

- ◆ 1st stage of labor: contractions are getting longer and stronger

During contractions : It is important to focus on exhaling, taking long, slow breaths to avoid hyperventilation, as if you were flickering a candle.

Between contractions : Focusing on your breathing can help relieve pain.

- ◆ Slow breathing provides the baby with more oxygen. By practicing this breathing technique during pregnancy, you will be more conscious of your breathing during childbirth.

STEP 2: Learning the pros and cons of each option

Column

Having your preferred support person with you during labor

What is this method like?

Receive continuous support during labor from a person of choice, as chosen by the woman in labor

Benefits of receiving “continuous support during labor” ^{1) 2)}

- ☐ Increase the chance of having a spontaneous vaginal delivery
- ☐ Decrease the possibility of needing a cesarean section
- ☐ Decrease the possibility of instrument-assisted delivery*
- ☐ Decrease the possibility of having to use epidural anesthesia
- ☐ Increase the possibility of having a positive birth experience
 - More likely to be satisfied with and positively evaluate childbirth experiences
 - Experience less out-of-control feelings during labor and delivery
- ☐ Decrease the possibility of signs of distress in the baby
 - A lower Apgar score will be higher after 5 minutes

Disadvantage of receiving “continuous support during labor” ²⁾

No adverse effects reported on mother and/or baby caused by “continuous support during labor.”



STEP 2: Learning the pros and cons of each option

💡 Important points 💡

Point 1 : Who can you ask for support? ¹⁾

- ◆ It does not matter who the woman chooses.
- ◆ Anyone in the family or acquaintances of the woman, such as a spouse, partner, friend, relative, trusted midwife or doula (who is trained in birth attendance but is not a professional in health care)
- ◆ The most important thing is that the woman in childbirth feels “want that support person to be with me” and “comfortable and secured,” and that both the woman and the support person “hope to spend the time of childbirth together.”
- ✂ Depending on the birth site, there may be restrictions on the number of people who can accomp

Point 2 : What is “continuous support” like? ^{1) 3)}

- ◆ Continuous support means encouraging the childbirthing woman with words, holding their hands, providing massage and pressure where needed, helping them to breathe correctly and practicing relaxation exercises with them, helping them with squats, sitting on a balance ball, walking, etc. to relieve pain and to facilitate labor. It also means providing support when they change birth positions.



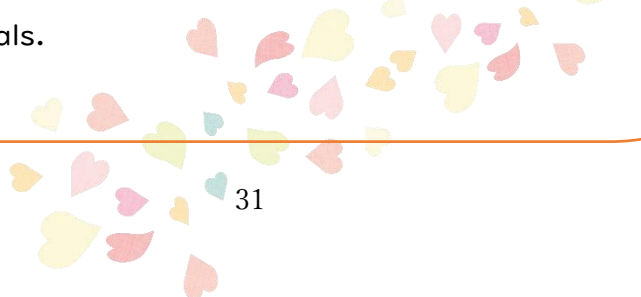
STEP 2: Learning the pros and cons of each option

Point 3 : I want to attend the birth. What shall I do?

- ◆ You have the option to attend the birth. It is important that the expectant mother and the person who wants to attend the birth have mutual wishes.
- ◆ Depending on the birth site, there may be restrictions. Please consult with the midwives at the birth site to see if you are able to attend the birth.

Point 4 : I do not want to be accompanied at childbirth. Or I have no one to ask for support during childbirth. What shall I do?

- ◆ If you do not wish to be accompanied, please tell the medical professionals that you do not wish to be accompanied during childbirth.
- ◆ Please convey your feelings to the midwife or other medical personnel at the birth site. You can cancel your wish to have an accompanying person at any time. The medical staff will support you in creating a comfortable environment for childbirth.
- ◆ It is a good idea to communicate well with the medical professionals at the birth site during pregnancy so that the expectant mother can find someone who they are comfortable to talk to.
- ◆ Situations such as “I wish to be accompanied but there is no one I can ask” or “I wish my midwife to be with me” should also be conveyed as part of Birth Plan to the midwife and other medical staff. They may initiate conversation between the expectant mother and medical professionals.



STEP 2: Learning the pros and cons of each option

Epidural birth



- There is also a method to use anesthetics to reduce labor pain more reliably, which is called an epidural birth.
- There are several types of pain-reducing childbirth delivery options using anesthetics including methods using epidural anesthesia, spinal anesthesia, and using both epidural and spinal anesthesia.¹⁾

*In Japan, epidural anesthesia is selected most of the time, so this Aid describes epidural anesthesia delivery as "delivery using anesthetics".

- Although delivery using anesthetics has benefits such as more reliable pain relief, it also has side-effects risks. A decision-making Aid has been developed to provide pregnant women who plan on having a vaginal delivery with medical knowledge about delivery using anesthetics and to help them choose between spontaneous delivery and delivery using anesthetics.
- Use the QR codes below to access a decision-making Aid to help you choose between spontaneous delivery and delivery using anesthetics:
“Finding a Way to Relieve Delivery Pain That is Right for You – Helping pregnant women make an informed decision about epidural anesthesia and no epidural anesthesia”

[For further information about delivery using anesthetics, please go to the website listed below.](https://www.healthliteracy.jp/decisionaid/decision/post-3.html)

<https://www.healthliteracy.jp/decisionaid/decision/post-3.html>



Japanese version



English version

STEP 3 Setting clear priorities for decision-making

<How to use STEP 3>

- In step 2, we checked the pros and cons of different options. In order to make a decision, it is important to have accurate information and at the same time your decision is based on what you value.
- It will be easier for you to consult with your doctor or midwife about delivery methods and birth plan if you are clear about what is important for your decision.
- On pages 4 to 32, you can read about the options to help clarify what is important for your decision and write down what you need to consider.

Let's consider how important the followings are to you.

0 : not important, 5 : most important. The higher the number, the more important it is to you. Circle the number that is most appropriate.

Pain associated with childbirth

Item	Less important			Most important		
	0	1	2	3	4	5
Thinking about pain associated with childbirth	0	1	2	3	4	5
Experiencing labor pain	0	1	2	3	4	5
Reducing labor pain	0	1	2	3	4	5

STEP 3 Setting clear priorities for decision-making

Choosing a method to relieve labor pain

Item	Less important			Most important		
Do not use pharmaceuticals as a method of relieving labor pain*	0	1	2	3	4	5
* Non-pharmaceuticals labor pain relief. Epidural anesthesia is not used.						
Using pharmaceuticals as a way to relieve labor pain*	0	1	2	3	4	5
*Pharmaceutical labor pain relief. Epidural anesthesia is used.						

Selection of non-pharmacological labor pain relief methods

Item	Less important			Most important		
Position yourself comfortably and move freely during labor	0	1	2	3	4	5
Give birth to your baby in any position you prefer	0	1	2	3	4	5
Receiving massage/compression to relieve labor pain	0	1	2	3	4	5
Warming the body to relieve labor pain	0	1	2	3	4	5
Using aromatherapy	0	1	2	3	4	5

STEP 3 Setting clear priorities for decision-making

Using acupuncture and Shiatsu for labor pain relief	0	1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

Using your preferred relaxation techniques (yoga, music, breathing techniques) during labor	0	1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

Receive continuous support during labor from a support person of your choice	0	1	2	3	4	5
--	---	---	---	---	---	---

Others

Is there anything else you would like to consider? Write them out in the table below.

Item	Less important						Most important					
	0	1	2	3	4	5						
	0	1	2	3	4	5						
	0	1	2	3	4	5						
	0	1	2	3	4	5						
	0	1	2	3	4	5						



STEP4 Determine how you want to experience childbirth

Let us see how ready you are to decide

You have learned basic knowledge and thought about your priorities for decision-making.

Now, let us make sure you are ready to make a decision.

Check ☒ if applicable.

- Do you know the benefits and risks of each option ?
☐ Yes ☐ No
- Are you clear about which benefits and risks matter most to you?
☐ Yes ☐ No
- Do you have enough support and advice to make a choice?
☐ Yes ☐ No
- Do you feel sure that the labor pain relief method is the best choice?
☐ Yes ☐ No

(Your choice of labor pain relief: _____)

It is possible to combine multiple options of non-pharmaceutical labor pain relief methods.

※ In addition, some non-pharmaceutical labor pain relief methods (massage/compression, aromatherapy, music, breathing techniques, etc.) can be used in combination with epidural anesthesia during childbirth.

The SURE Test © Légaré, et al.(2010). Translation : Wakako Osaka et al.
(2018) Partially modified

STEP4 Determine how you want to experience childbirth

If you answered “No” to at least one of the above four questions, you may not be ready to make a decision yet. Is there anything else you want to do before making your decision?

Let us find out what you want to do by using the checklist on the following page.

Let us find out what you want to do next before taking Action

You can determine your priorities about what you want to do next before taking action by checking off items on the following checklist

- ☐ None. I am ready to make my decision.
- ☐ I need to talk to (person) about my options.
- ☐ I need to be clear about which advantages and disadvantages matter most to me.
- ☐ Besides that, I need to do .

- Many women may be figuring out what to do and how to proceed before making a decision. Clarifying what you want to do with the help of the above checklist will make it easy for you to take the next step.

STEP4 Determine how you want to experience childbirth

- If you feel that you still do not fully understand the available options, you are encouraged to read STEP 2 “Learning the pros and cons of each option” in this Aid again, or ask your doctor and midwife for further explanation.
- If you are still uncertain about your priorities for decision-making, you are encouraged to read STEP 3 “Setting clear priorities for decision-making” again or talk to people such as midwives, family and friends, and women who have experienced childbirth before.

How do you feel now?



How do you feel about childbirth delivery methods, your childbirth time and labor pain relief methods now? Check off the item that best matches your feelings from the list below.

<Other thoughts about what you require or don't require during childbirth>
(free description)

Let us determine how you want to experience childbirth
(Birth Plan)

STEP4 Determine how you want to experience childbirth

<Wish list for delivery method>

- ☐ I want to relieve labor pain without using epidural anesthesia
(Spontaneous delivery)
- ☐ I want to use epidural anesthesia to relieve labor pain (Epidural)
- ☐ I cannot decide which is better between spontaneous delivery or epidural or I prefer both

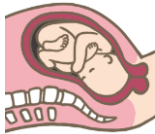

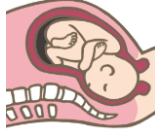
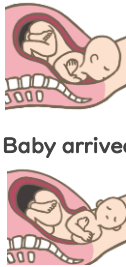

<Wish list for how I want to experience childbirth and labor pain relief>

- ☐ **Move freely about during labor**
- ☐ Give birth in my preferred position
- ☐ Use massage · acupressure to relieve labor pain
- ☐ Soaking in a hot bath (Soak in a hot water, Hot compress) to relieve labor pain
- ☐ Use aromatherapy

At the end of this Aid, feel free to write down your thoughts about how you want to experience childbirth, including the choices you have made so far, and what you would like for attendants and medical professionals who will be present to help you.

STEP4

Determine how you want to experience childbirth

	1st stage of Labor			2nd stage of Labor	3rd stage of Labor
Time required	< primiparous woman >		10-12 hours	2-3 hours	15-30 min
	< multiparous woman >		4-6 hours	1-1.5 hours	10-20 min
Labor pains	Regular pain within 10 min. Menstrual-like pain gradually getting stronger	5-6 min intervals Lower abdomen and lower back pain getting stronger	2-3 min intervals, pressure to anus, strain starts	1-2 min intervals, according to contractions keep straining	Weaker uterine contractions
Cervical dilation	0-3 cm 	4-7 cm 	8-10 	Maximum 10cm Baby arrived 	Expelled placenta 
How you want to experience childbirth					
Wishes to convey to accompanying person and medical staff					

In conclusion



Process of developing this Aid

This Aid was developed based on international standards for decision-making guides, theories of decision-making, and has been developed with input from physicians, midwives, decision-making researchers, and women who have given birth. The medical information written here has been checked by obstetricians and midwives. This Aid does not cover all medical information, but it does provide basic beneficial information.

No financial support of any kind was received from healthcare-related companies or other entities for creating this Aid (declaring no conflicts of interest).

Making your own informed choice

There is no right or wrong decision about choosing which childbirth delivery method or labor pain relief method to use. Sharing your values and preferences with healthcare professionals and understanding professional opinions about the options will allow you to make your own informed choice.

Each option has its own advantages and disadvantages. This Aid was created to help you understand the advantages and disadvantages of each option from a medical perspective, examine which advantages and disadvantages are important to you according to your values, and facilitate communication with doctors, midwives, family, colleagues and friends, and women who have already experienced childbirth.

Update on the information in the “Things you can do for childbirth”

The information published in this Aid should be used to facilitate communication with healthcare professionals, and to help you organize the information you learn and your priorities for making decisions. This information is not intended to be a substitute for the advice of healthcare professionals.

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“Things you can do at childbirth” Aid
To determine how you experience childbirth
and how to relieve labor pain in your own way

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Please access the citations and references from the QR code below.



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