

Mindfulness techniques offer something that parents can do themselves during birth. Using techniques such as mindful breathing, noting the pause in the breath can feel empowering. Such techniques can trigger the parasympathetic ('rest and digest') response so can help reduce stress. They are also accessible and practical; and can be done anywhere at any time.

Some mindfulness practices are not advised for use after a traumatic event, but grounding techniques such as looking for all of the objects in a room which are a certain colour can be helpful.

Mindfulness works well with other therapeutic preparations and approaches, so can be part of a wider offering. It also is a practice so needs to be developed over time in order to be of most use, ideally through pregnancy or before. As well as being beneficial in pregnancy and birth it can be very useful in helping with postnatal adjustments and parenting.

## FURTHER READING

Apps such as Calm, Headspace and Nourish are accessible and affordable ways to practice.

Local classes and practitioners can support in finding a comfortable way to practice.

The Minded Institute offers evidence based practices

This exercise is designed to increase awareness of breathing, triggering the para-sympathetic nervous system (inner calm), enabling a labouring mother to endure the physical sensations of labour and cope better with challenges or changes as or when they occur. Please ask someone to read this to you:

'To start, bring your attention to your breath and see if you can observe the breath despite any other distracting sensations in your body. Focus on the passage the breath takes as it enters your nose, travelling through to your lungs, and then the path through from your chest, your throat and your mouth as you exhale. On the next inhale, notice if the air feels cool or fresh as you breath in and how your ribcage expands, then follow it's warm passage when leaving your body and your diaphragm drops down into your belly.

Take a few more conscious breaths, focusing on the natural rhythm your body sets as you trigger your natural calm and oxygenate every cell and muscle in your body, allowing you to relax a little more. Breathing In, pausing a moment and breathing out. Noticing the pauses between each inhalation and exhalation. A brief moment of stillness between each breath, bringing your attention to each moment. Being present in your breath. Not trying to change how you breathe, not judging how you breathe, but being pleasantly aware of each breath and the calming, relaxation it gives your mind and your body. A focus in this moment, of life-giving, soothing breath. Allowing yourself to remain focused on the breath and knowing that by doing this, you are in control. You are calming, softening and relaxing into every moment. Every sensation your body brings is softened into because of your breath and how you are consciously choosing to be mindful of your breath.

Give yourself permission to direct your attention back to your breath if your mind wanders or you find yourself fixating on any distracting sensations. With kindness and self compassion you are able to choose to return to your breathing again and again as many times as you need. Counting each breath. Bringing your mind and body into balance simply by choosing to notice how you breathe. Where you breathe. And what you feel when you breathe. See if you can direct the breath into any physical sensations you feel. Using your breath as a calming anchor. Stilling you, rooting and grounding you gently into the moment. Moment by moment. Slowing your mind down, almost going into it frame by frame. Knowing that by breathing this way you are filling your body with the oxygen it needs to calm, soften and nourish you and your baby. Naturally letting go of any tension and distancing from any thoughts you may notice. They are just thoughts. Observing, instead of absorbing. Stepping back. Watching. Waiting until it all fades away. Then choosing to focus on the breath again. Embracing every sensation. Not trying to fight it or change it in any way. Accepting that your body is functioning the only way it knows how and that's okay. Grateful for your body and accepting this process as normal, in this moment. Scan your body and see if you can notice other sensations. Normal sensations such as how your shoulders feel and let them loosen if you notice any tension. Then move to Your jaw. Your neck. Your back. Your Chest. Your belly. Your Your arms and your hands. Your legs, feet and toes. Sense your whole body as one. All connected. All relaxed in this moment.

Allowing a little smile as you acknowledge how it feels to just be in the moment. Not in the past. Not in the future. Simply here. Right now. Calm. Body softening. Mind sNow open your eyes and be aware of your surroundings. Pressing "Pause" on the world around you as you take time to notice all that you can see; all the colours, the textures, the shapes. Take your time. Softening into the experience. With no judgement, bring your focus onto one thing in particular and really look at it, as if you're seeing it for the first time. What does it really look like? Hard? Soft? Shiny? Curved? Straight? Allow your focus to soften into what you see. Close your eyes again if you feel the desire to.

Now sense what you can hear. Where are those sounds coming from? Are there varying tones within the sound? Louder? Softer? Higher? Lower? Is it familiar to you? Accepting it all in this moment, as it is. Breathe it in. Notice where you are in every sensory detail... saying to yourself "May I be safe, May I be calm, May I be balanced, May I be still"

Thank you for taking the time to do this exercise and well done for taking time for yourself. Continue to use this technique as many times as you need throughout your childbirth and at any other time you need to find your inner calm, balance and peace.'