



ISSUE# 13

Article 5 : Try this: Using the squatting position during labour and for birth

During labour (first stage)...

It's best to use a low stool for easy squatting to avoid tiring yourself. You can buy an inexpensive plastic stool from most hardware shops. These can also be used in the shower or in the bath tub so you can squat and run warm water down your back for pain relief!

Squatting during contractions in the first stage of labour is likely to make them more intense, because the baby's head is encouraged to go down into the open pelvis. This exerts pressure on the cervix and stimulates contractions. Most women prefer to use a stool for squatting as a resting position and then to get up and stand during contractions. While some women find easy squats useful in labour, some prefer to avoid this position and prefer kneeling or standing.

Try this:

With your sitting bones resting on the stool, squat with your knees wide apart and your trunk leaning forward a little. You can rest your elbows on your knees or relax onto a support in front of you if you want to.

During the birth itself (second stage)...now you get a passionate urge to push the baby out. Waves of power will sweep through you, demanding all your energy to work with them. First your baby will move down with each push and then forward as the head crowns. Your partner or midwife can suggest that you put your hands down and feel the top of the head. Then the head crowns, the forehead and face appear, and the head slips through. As the rest of the body slides out, you share the joy and wonder of the birth of your baby.

Supported squatting may be a suitable position for the birth of your baby - if you find deep squatting quite comfortable. If not, a standing squat leaning forward or a kneeling position may be a better alternative. If you intend to give birth in the squatting position, wait until your baby's head crowns before you adopt the full supported squat as this position can be tiring if you start using it as soon as you begin pushing. Before then you could stand or kneel to push like this.

Try this:

There are several variations of the squatting position you could use before your baby's head crowns.

Stand with your feet flat on the floor and wide apart, knees slightly bent in a standing squat position. Hold onto the back of a chair with your hands. Imagine having the urge to push in second stage. Direct the energy of the push down towards the floor while making a deep sound 'ooh'. Pushing is a reflexive action and is impossible to practise. Trying out the position without straining, will help you to remember to get up and try a standing squat at the time. This will make it much easier to push and is more comfortable than a deep squat for most women. The help of gravity will assist your baby's descent and increase the power of the contractions.

You can also do this in a kneeling position (a variation of squatting). Try kneeling on a soft surface on the floor and hold onto a firm support in front of you such as the back of a bed, the side of a birth pool, or the back or seat of a chair.

Or try it on hands and knees. This position gives you added support as both hands and knees are in contact with the floor. You can push into the floor and also back towards your feet. Many women find this counter pressure helpful. If progress is slow, it is probably wiser to get up into a more vertical position.

If there is a birthing stool available, this helps to make squatting in second

stage much easier. Your partner can sit on a low stool behind you to hold or support you. You can rest your arms on his thighs or he can place his arms under your armpits so you can hold onto his hands without straining your shoulders.

Another idea is to have your partner sit on a birth ball behind you. Squat down with your hands in front of you on the floor to support you. Let your partner roll the ball towards your lower back until it is just touching your coccyx. Then lean back using your partner's thighs for support with the ball providing a touch of support to your lower back to make this position much easier.

After your baby's head crowns

Some women find the squatting position for birth enjoyable and comforting, as well as comfortable, and for others it is too strenuous to maintain (this can be dramatically easier under water). You can give birth in a squatting position with just one supporter. Your partner can sit on a chair, on a birth ball or on the edge of a bed, while you squat with your back towards him and your body cradled between his legs, using his thighs for support. If you are in a birth pool, your partner can sit on the rim while you squat between his legs.

When using a chair, it's best for the supporter to sit well forward on the seat so that the mother can rest without the seat of the chair digging into her back. Using a birth ball is generally best as the soft ball absorbs the weight, making it more comfortable for the partner and also provides a touch of support in the back for the mother. Try both positions making sure that your feet are flat on the floor and you both feel comfortable. Try coming forward onto your hands and knees or standing up. You will need to change your position to rest as the full squat cannot generally be sustained for very long without becoming tiring.

The benefits of squatting are that it opens the pelvis to its widest and also positions the mother's body so that the baby's descent through the pelvis is helped to the maximum by gravity. The angle of descent of the baby is directly down and out towards the earth and the power of the contractions is optimal.

"I squatted between Ron's knees as he sat on a chair and I supported myself on his thighs with my elbows, resting my back in his lap. We looked in the mirror to see our baby's head emerging, then, before the midwife could put her gloves on, all of him was born, and he was placed in my arms to suckle."

Here is another possibility for partner support in the squatting position:

Face your partner as he sits well back on the seat of a chair or stool, feet flat on the floor for balance. Then hold each other firmly (but not tightly) by the wrists with elbows straight as you squat down, keeping your heels on the floor. You can pull on your partner for support as you go down and hold on to him while in the position. This way of squatting is easier for you and your partner and is especially effective in relaxing the perineum as the baby is being born.

In any squatting position, you can take a rest by slowly standing up or kneeling forward onto your hands and knees. Some women use the squatting position during contractions and rest in an alternative position. It's also helpful to squat periodically in between, instead of during contractions.

Squatting is known as the physiological position for birth, used by women in cultures all over the world for centuries. In these societies squatting is the position used for resting, working and for defecation as well as birth. With our modern lifestyle we rarely squat and this has become an impossibly uncomfortable position for many adults. Preparation for birth with yoga helps to increase ease and familiarity with the squatting position, but there are plenty of alternative positions if you are not comfortable with it. It is much easier to squat in water - even for women who find it impossible on land.

REMEMBER: Just before your baby is born, you may need to use will power rather than instinct to get in to a squatting position. It may be the last thing you feel like doing. Once in a supported squat that is comfortable for you, you will probably find it that the birth progresses much more easily and it was worth the effort of getting into the position. Supported squatting can help some women to give birth normally after an epidural and can reduce the need for ventouse or forceps to assist the birth.

"After two hours of pushing I was exhausted. The midwife had left the room to call the registrar to help deliver my baby with ventouse. I suddenly remembered you telling us about the benefits of squatting. My partner helped me stand up and hold onto a chair. By the time the midwife returned

the head was crowning and she just had time to get her gloves on and catch him!"

" I couldn't find my power in the birthing pool. It felt too floaty. Once I stepped on to dry land I used a squat with my feet flat on the floor and my partner behind me. I put my hands down and felt the top of his little head. Within minutes he was born. The midwife helped me to lift him up myself. I couldn't believe I was doing it - and I'm still amazed at myself!

© copyright Janet Balaskas 2004

[active birth centre](#) | [shopping](#) | [main page](#) | [article 1](#) | [article 2](#) | [article 3](#) | [article 4](#) | [article 5](#) | [article 6](#) | [contact us](#)

Active Birth Centre 25 Bickerton Road London N19 5JT Tel: 020 7281 6760 Fax: 020 7263 8098
www.activebirthcentre.com or mail@activebirthcentre.com