



# How to use a Birth Ball

## From Bumps 2 Babies

TIPS & ADVICE FROM AN EXPERIENCED MIDWIFE

# How to use a birth ball to prepare for labour

Many women tell me they felt compelled to purchase a birth ball but then don't know what to do with it so it sits in the corner gathering dust and eventually becomes a favourite giant football for your growing child!

The first thing you need to do is make sure that you buy the correct size birthing ball. They come in three sizes 55- 75cm, and you choose the size based on how tall you are.

We like [this one from Amazon](#) as it's great quality and comes with a handy exercise manual. It's important to get a pregnancy ball not a gym ball as these are safer and in the unlikely event of a puncture you are not launched to the ground but deflated gently instead!

## How to size your birth ball

Choose a ball depending on your height:

- Under 5ft 4inches use a 55cms ball.
- Up to 5ft 9 inches tall you should choose the 65cm ball.
- Over 5ft 9inches in height and you will need the 75cm ball.

Once the ball is well pumped up –that's your partner's job! – take a seat on it and check the angle of your knees. Ensure your knees are lower than your hips and place your feet in the 10 to 2 position as this will encourage good posture, and shift the weight of your baby forwards, thus relieving pressure from your lower back.

## Ok, you've bought it ...what to do with it now ?

- Use as a seat for an hour each evening instead of sitting on sofa. Relaxing all evening on a squashy sofa in the third trimester of pregnancy with your knees higher than you hips encourages poor posture and leads to babies who adopt a back to back position which creates more challenge for you during labour and birth.

- Sit on the ball when having a meal, watching TV, working on your laptop at a table.
- Use it as part of your Pelvic floor preparation (see further information below).
- Take it to work if you have a desk job and use it as a seat.

## Using the birth ball correctly

Place on a carpet or mat, then put your hand on ball first or place in the corner of the room so that you cannot fall backwards, or get your partner to stand with you whilst you get yourself stable.

Birth balls encourage good posture as there is no back rest so you need to sit tall & use your postural muscles in your back and pelvis for balance.

Sit with your knees hip width apart, think tall as if a piece of string is attached to the crown of your head.

Relax your shoulders away from your ears, roll shoulders back and down draw abdominal muscles inwards, ensure your chin is parallel to the floor.

## Exercises using a birthing ball

As pregnancy progresses your bump becomes heavier and bigger, and an anterior tilt becomes common with pain in your lower back and buttocks so to counteract this you will need to do pelvic tilts. Lets look at how.

### **Pelvic tilts**

These are perfect for relieving tension in the lower back, especially as your bump gets heavier and your pelvis starts to tilt forward.

- Sit tall on your birthing ball with good posture: shoulders back and down, neck long, chest lifted and abdominals gently pulled inwards.

- Tuck/tilt your pelvis under so that you are rounding and lengthening through your lower back (lumbar spine).
- Feel the lower abdominals tightening around the bottom of your bump, and a pleasant release of tension in your lower back.
- Repeat until tension in lower back releases.

### **Cat and cow position using birth ball**

Another exercise that is perfect for relieving tension in the lower back



[CLICK HERE TO WATCH A SHORT VIDEO FOR INSTRUCTIONS](#)

### **Squats using birth ball**

An important exercise for lengthening and strengthening the perineum to reduce tearing in labour



[CLICK HERE TO WATCH A SHORT VIDEO FOR INSTRUCTIONS](#)

## Child's pose using a birthing ball

This is an incredibly relaxing stretch for pregnancy and you will feel the tensions in your back, shoulders, neck and chest wash away as you let yourself sink into this move.

- Place your hands on the birthing ball in front of you.
- Sit back onto your heels.
- Relax through the whole of your spine, from your neck down to your tailbone. Inhale deeply and as you exhale, let yourself sink downwards



## Pelvic floor exercises on a birthing ball

Doing your pelvic floor exercises on a birthing ball will encourage you to focus on posture. Build up to doing at least 2-3 sets of pelvic floor exercises per day.

Here's the technique:

- Sit tall on your birthing ball with good posture: shoulders back and down, neck long, chest lifted and abdominals gently pulled inwards.
- Start off by pulling up at the "back passage", as if stopping yourself from passing wind in public!
- Now pull up at the "front passage", as if stopping yourself from weeing.
- You can place a hand at the very bottom of your abdominals (just above your pubic bone and at the very bottom of your bump) to see if you can feel your deep abdominals co-contracting with the pelvic floor. If you can feel this area tensing up under your hand, then you know that you are doing your Pelvic floor pull ups correctly.
- Try to relax the rest of the body, and remember to BREATHE (see section below)

# Other simple exercises on your birth ball

## **Hip circling to right and to left**

Relieves round ligament pain back pain and optimises fetal position. Circle to right, circle to left. Feel the release. Do it daily to strengthen muscles and this is also great in labour.

## **Figure of 8 with hips**

This exercise moves babies head into pelvic area making birth easier. Use reverse figure of 8 too. Use music if you like to enhance your happy hormones try to exercise for 20 mins a day as it really helps with aches and pains.

## **Moving hips from side to side to release tension in hips**

Only stretch as far as is comfortable. Pain is a red flag, your body tells you what hurts and what needs to be released

## **Side stretch arm over head and then do it on the other side**

## **Place arms behind you to open up your chest**

**Whilst kneeling place arms and head on the ball and do hip circles hip circles.** This helps your lower back and abdominal aches and then reverse the action when ready.



## **Kneeling Figure of 8**

Whilst kneeling imagine having a pen drawing a figure 8 feel the release in your lower and upper back & your abdominal ligaments won't feel as tight or tense.

Other fantastic fitness and exercise routines can be found here on the [Spinning Babies Website](#).

# The importance of breathing correctly and the link to the pelvic floor

What do you do when you really, really, really have to go to the bathroom, but you are stuck in traffic. Maybe hold your breath? Suck in your stomach? Perhaps a quick lesson on how the two systems work together can help you manage those extra minutes a bit better.

Our main breathing muscle is the diaphragm, a dome shaped muscle under the rib cage. When we breathe in, the diaphragm flattens out and pushes on our abdominal contents (stomach, intestines, bladder, etc), sending them down toward our pelvis. At the same time, the abdominal muscles tighten a little bit and the muscles of the pelvic floor, located between your pubic bone and tailbone, lengthen a little bit. This allows us to manage the increase in pressure in our abdomen that occurs when the diaphragm flattens out. When we breathe out, essentially the opposite happens: the diaphragm relaxes and goes back up toward the heart, the organs move up as well and the pelvic floor muscles contract.

During pregnancy its important to engage the right muscle pattern and to focus on breathing.

## **Try this exercise**

Lie on your back with a pillow under your side so that you are not too flat. Place a pillow under your head and one under your knees. Breathe in through your nose gently and feel the rise of your stomach.

Now exhale gently through your nose. Imagine the up and down motion of the diaphragm and the effects on the organs.

Do this a few times.

Now bring your awareness to your pelvic floor muscles. As you breathe out, see if you can engage them by squeezing them gently.

This would be the same as stopping the flow of urine when going to the bathroom (do NOT do that as an exercise as it can lead to urge incontinence).

The key is to not only contract when you exhale, but also relax when you inhale.

As this gets easier to do, practice in a variety of positions.

And the next time you really, really need to go, but are still a few minutes away from the bathroom, focus on breathing out and contracting your pelvic floor muscles.

Get into the swing of this when pregnant as it becomes even more vital postnatally when you are trying to restore your core muscles and strengthen your pelvic floor to minimise mid life issues with trickling when coughing or laughing.

Remember that if you cannot control the passage of urine or find you are leaking when you cough or sneeze at 6 weeks postnatally you must get a referral to a woman health physiotherapist for an assessment and exercise regime.