



Acupressure to naturally encourage labour and reduce pain

In Traditional Chinese Medicine, the body has 12 meridians/ channels. There are over 600 acupuncture points on these meridians, with a multitude of functions benefiting the emotions, spirit and body. Below are the most relevant points for encouraging natural labour and reducing pain during birth.

Acupressure points are the same location as the acupuncture points and they are surprisingly powerful. These points are like power tools for your birth partner to support you on your journey.

Try to practice the points every day from 36 weeks. It's really important that your birth partner is familiar with these power points now, so they can support you during and after birth.



Using acupressure:

- Promotes natural labour and partner involvement
- As a guideline, use direct firm pressure on the point or points for 1-3 minutes
- Focus on breathing together
- Use thumb, forefingers, knuckles, elbows or a pincer grip to press the point/s
- Press one side or both points at once
- Measurements are based on the woman's hand and finger widths
- The size of point varies from 5- 20 cent piece
- Get feedback from your partner regarding which points feel best during the different stages of labour
- **Safe to use these points 1-2 x daily from 36 weeks (never before)**

ACUPRESSURE POINTS FOR PAIN RELIEF IN LABOUR

LI 4 (Large Intestine 4)

Location & technique

This point is located in the webbing between the thumb and forefinger; find the highest point on the fleshy mound when thumb and index finger are close together. Use a pincer grip to hold this point.

Benefits

- Improves circulation to the uterus
- Stimulates uterine contractions**
- General pain relief in labour**, especially as she heads into transition.
- Use during second stage great if she is fatigued and not pushing effectively



SP 6 (Spleen 6)

Location

The point is found on the inside of the ankle, 4 fingerbreadths above the medial malleolus (ankle bone), behind the edge of the shin bone. You may feel a slight depression in that area. Sometimes an easy way to find it is to slide your finger up from the inner ankle bone and you will almost drop into the point.

Technique

Apply direct pressure with thumb or index finger. Women having their first child or those who have experienced dilation difficulties in a previous birth might like to use this point in early labour. **Use in early labour by applying firm acupressure on one leg at a time for approximately one minute, then using it on the opposite leg 20 - 30 minutes later.**



Benefits

- It encourages the cervix to dilate efficiently
- Strengthens contractions
- Useful during prolonged, delayed or difficult labour

BL60 (Bladder 60)

Location

Between the tip of the outer ankle bone and the achilles tendon, imagine the ankle bone is the mountain and then drop down into the deepest part of the 'valley'. Hold in a pincer grip- the opposing inner ankle point helps alleviate fear and boosts deeper energy reserves.



Benefits

- Gets baby into a great position
- Encourages baby to descend down birth canal

Use during first stages of labour. Try holding this point during a contraction and then Sp6 (inner ankle) in between to increase intensity of contractions.

GB21 (Gall Bladder 21)

Location

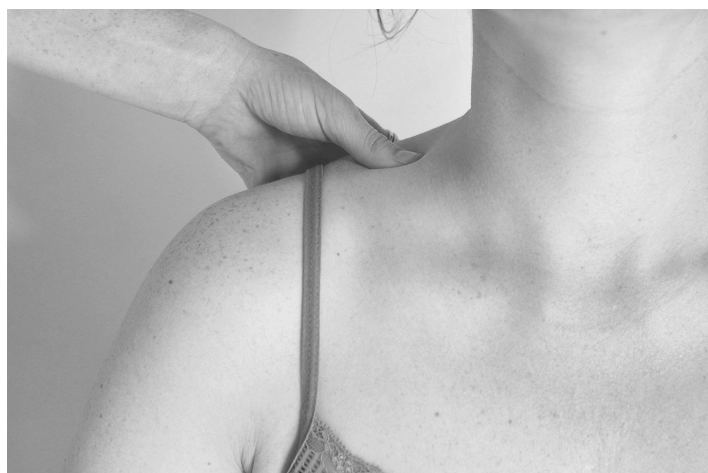
Find the midline of the spine and edge of the shoulder- the point is halfway in between, at the highest point of the shoulder muscle. The location can feel quite tender as many people hold their stress there.

Techniques

- The pressure can be applied at the beginning of each contraction, intensify the pressure as the contraction builds.
- You can use thumbs / knuckles / elbows and natural body weight
- If she is seated, you can stand behind and use your elbows for stronger pressure on the points.

Benefits

- This point **aids the first and second stages of labour** by sending the energy downwards, **encouraging the foetus to descend down the birth canal.**
- Can stimulate uterine contractions**
- It's also great to reduce shoulder tension, enabling a release of oxytocin.



KD1 (Kidney 1)

Location

On the sole of the foot

Can use anytime during birth

Great to use during second stage labour

Benefits

- This is a very **grounding**, connecting point
- This point is very **calming and relaxing**
- Useful is there is feelings of panic
- It helps to bring her back into her body and out of her head, which may be in overdrive with fear, worries and panic.
- Ask her to do some deep breathing to connect to the point.



GB30 (Gall Bladder 30)

When the support person places their hands on the woman's hips they can push their thumbs into this point, helping the woman to move in rotating movements during contractions.

This point can be used as the women enters transition, either with direct pressure or combined with strong downward massage from Ciliao BL-32 out to this point.

This point helps open hips and clear blockages, creating a better flow.



BL32 (Bladder 32)

Located in the sacral foramen holes. Measure her middle finger from the tip to top of the knuckle. The distance from the top of her 'bum crack' to the top of that finger measurement is roughly where the points are located, one thumb width out from spine. Don't worry if you are on bladder 31 or 32 they are both great for pain relief, do both if you can locate them.



Technique

The woman is in a comfortable position- hands on wall, on bed. She can then rock her hips into the partner's acupressure

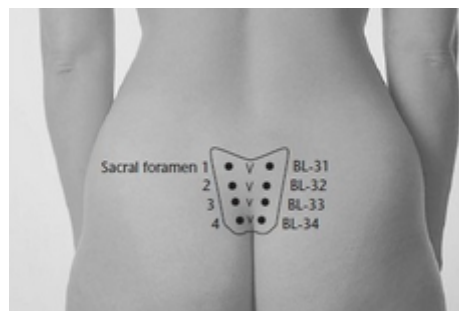
Benefits

-Anesthetising effect

-Effective pain relief near transition when the contractions are very intense

-Promotes cervical dilation

-Resolves cervical lip



COMBINATIONS

ANXIETY/PANIC

KD1 (Kidney 1) & LR3 (Liver 3)

Kidney 1 Location

On the sole of the foot

Liver 3 Location

Above KD1 of the top of the foot.

Safe to use during pregnancy

Great to use during second stage labour

Benefits

- This is a very grounding, connecting point
- This point is very calming and relaxing
- Useful is there is feelings of panic
- It helps to bring her back into her body and out of her head, which may be in overdrive with fear, worries and panic.
- Ask her to do some deep breathing to connect to the point.



UNESTABLISHED LABOUR

If a woman's membranes have ruptured LI4, SP-6 and BL-32 can be used to encourage contractions and help establish labour.

- SP6, LI4 & BL32 encourage cervix to dilate- each point for 3-5 minutes, every 1-2 hours.
- Firm downward strokes from BL32 through to the buttocks for 5 minutes once or twice a day.



FAILURE TO PROGRESS SECOND STAGE LABOUR

LI4 and SP6

Acupressure can be used for several minutes on each point. If possible LI4 on one hand can be used in combination with the SP6 point of the opposite leg.

Ten minutes later this combination can be repeated starting with LI4 on the opposite hand.



CERVICAL LIP SWOLLEN

This is when, although the woman feels the urge to push, the cervix has not yet dilated fully. The cervix then has a swollen “lip” which makes it difficult to achieve full dilation. The woman will be told not to push by her midwife or doctor.



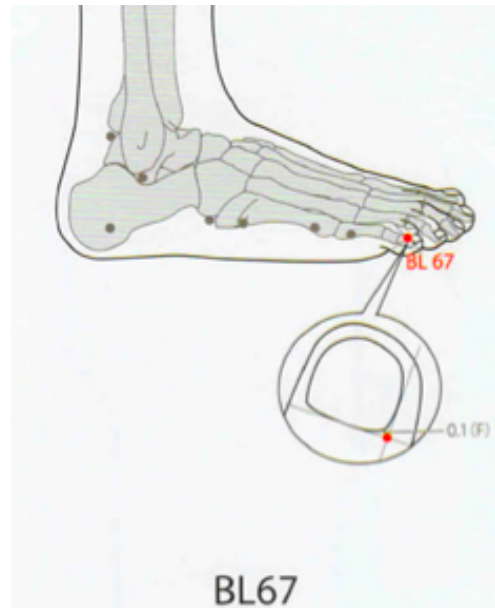
If this becomes a problem during labour SP-6 and BL-32 can be used.

Strong pressure with your knuckles is applied into BL-32 for up to ten minutes.

If possible using pressure to SP-6 (ankle pic above) can also be used in combination.

OPTIMAL POSITIONING

BL67 (Bladder 67), BL60 (Bladder 60)
SP6 (Spleen 6) inner ankle



Use SP6 (inner ankle) in between contractions, during contractions, hold BL60 during to encourage turning.

Try this for a few contractions and if no change, try the combination SP6 and BL67 (edge of little toe).

Use the tip of a ball point pen to press the point BL67 (on the edge of the little toes) during contractions.

This point adjusts the energy of the uterus and may encourage the bub to turn.

PLACENTA DELIVERY

BL60, SP6 & GB21 promote efficient delivery of placenta

SP6 Inner ankle promotes tightening of uterus

BL60 and GB21 encourage placenta to descend



POSTNATAL

Regulate hormones and reduce after pains

SP6 encourage uterus to contract



Breast Feeding

GB21 - encourages let down response



Energy and Milk Supply

St36 (Stomach 36)

Location

4 fingers below bottom of knee bone,
one thumb width out (you should feel a
small depression there)

Benefits

Energy, increase milk supply

You can use this point during birth or
postpartum for an energy boost.

Increases Qi and blood.

You can press it on your bub to help settle
their stomach and boost their immune.



CALMING POINTS

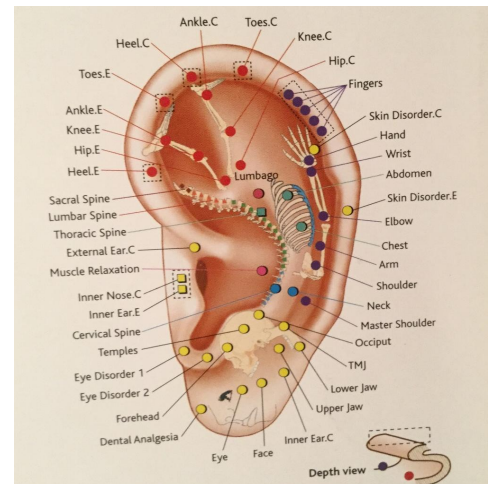
Yin Tang

This is one of my favourite points- it calms the mind and increases intuition. It is located between the two eyebrows. I've found stroking this point downwards to the bridge of the nose really helps to **calm the mind** as well as settle babies.



Ear massage

In Chinese medicine, the ear is a microsystem for the entire body (similar to reflexology on the feet). Massaging your ears for 30 seconds stimulates all the parts of the body and can make you feel more **calm and energised**. Babies seem to like to too.



Nausea, vomiting or anxiety

PC6 (Pericardium 6)

Location

3 finger breadths up from wrist crease, in between the two tendons. Easier to find if she clenches her hand and rolls fist inwards.

Technique

Apply a deep pressure
Easy for her to hold the point herself

Benefits

Helps stop nausea and vomiting
Reduces anxiety



This is a good one to hold on the drive to hospital.

SPECIAL HAND-COMB TECHNIQUE

One of my clients claimed this simple technique got her through labour without drugs (and hot showers)!

Make sure you have two plastic combs in your birth kit.

These points lie along the creases of the hands where the fingers join the palm. These are said to help release endorphins (the body's natural painkillers) into the body.



Technique

Women can hold a small comb in the palm of their hand so that the teeth of the comb are touching these points. They can then grip the comb during contractions, applying pressure to the level that feels the most useful.

This image and tip is from Debra Betts, NZ midwife and acupuncturist. I'd like to thank her for her inspiration and education in relation to acupressure and acupuncture in pregnancy and birth.

Lifestyle Advice leading up to birth:

Patience, surrender and trust are emotions that will help you get through this time (easier than it sounds!). Ultimately birth is the one thing you can't control so 'letting go' and surrendering will help this process. Looking at the bigger picture helps. Remind yourself that in the next 1-4 weeks you will be a new mum. **Please give yourself permission to rest.**

Write a list of things that make you happy. Pop it on the fridge. Do the things on the list. Use this transitional time to put your feet up, listen to music, go for leisurely walks in the park, read a book, or watch a movie that makes you laugh. Creating feelings of oxytocin will encourage labour.

Delegate for example get a cleaner or increase the time they spend.

If you're feeling tired, **say no to most of those social events** and experience JOMO (joy of missing out). Stay local or get friends to come to yours for cups of tea- less effort!

Weekly acupuncture sessions from 36 weeks will encourage natural labour, ripen cervix and regulate hormones. A postnatal session about a month after birth can help you rebalance and speed up recovery time. If you have breastfeeding concerns such as supply, let down or mastitis, come in asap for an appointment to get things flowing.

Eat 6 fresh dates a day in TCM they are thought to help soften the cervix. Pop them in bliss balls and smoothies- great to take bliss balls to hospital too.

Sex and orgasms the endorphins will help you relax and promote labour. Sperm is thought to ripen the cervix. If sex is uncomfortable just get the 'essence!'

Practice yoga and stretching every day.

Labour preparation massage or reflexology will also help get things moving and make you very relaxed.

Raspberry leaf tea or capsules are great to be having daily to encourage tightening of the uterus (capsules available at Marrickville clinic). Continue to use after the birth as it helps with milk production and continues to encourage the uterus to contract. Make it strong- you can even steep it overnight and drink it in the morning - hot or chilled.

Guided meditations Check out, 'Be Fertile - Overdue' on Spotify. Be Fertile, have a breastfeeding one too.

Digital detox Switch off social media- perhaps pop up a FB post saying you'll let everyone know once your baby has arrived and you've bonded and that you are signing off in the interim. This will **reduce social pressure** which can add to pre-labour stress.

Turn your energy inwards and connect with yourself, your breath, your body and your baby.