

Labour focus points

There is a set of shiatsu points that, in women, have a strong effect on the uterus and the reproductive hormones. Some of these are “elimination” points, which are frequently stimulated outside pregnancy to treat headaches, sickness, cramp or constipation. They are often called the induction points, but I prefer to call them labour focus points because they don’t work in the same way as labour-inducing drugs.

When your birth partner stimulates your labour focus points for you, they will not make you go into labour if you are not ready, but they will help to release energy that can support you when you are. You also can use them during labour itself.

Provided you only use these points for as long and as often as they feel comfortable, then you cannot force yourself into labour before you are ready, or overstimulate the uterus and create overly strong contractions. However, they do help to ready your body for giving birth, and they do help the process of labour to flow. They also affect your baby, so they will help your baby to prepare for his birth.

How they work

The labour focus points work by balancing energy in your body’s meridians. They do not put anything into your body, they simply help what is already there to flow better. This means that they affect different people in different ways. Each point has a distinct effect and mothers will respond to those particular points, which produce the effects they need. As only some will work for you, you are not likely to need to use them all. If a point is a good one for you, you will probably know immediately because it will just “feel right”. The point may help you to feel very relaxed, it may stimulate movement of your baby or it may even stimulate contractions.

When to use the points

Because many of the labour focus points are strong elimination points, they should not be stimulated during pregnancy before term (that is, before around 37-38 weeks).

If you use them at any stage in the late second and early third trimesters when your baby is fully developed, then they will probably have no effect because your body is not ready to give birth. However, if your body is trying to go into labour prematurely, stimulating the points may help your body to do so. While they won’t

create premature labour, they can help it along, so be especially wary of using them if you have a history of premature labour.

It is definitely not a good idea to use these points during the first trimester: when your body is trying to hold on to your baby and needs support to do that. Using the points will not create the miscarriage of a healthy baby, but they may encourage a body that is attempting to miscarry.

The labour focus points are useful from 37–38 weeks, because that is when your body and baby are preparing for birth. You can use them from this time on for as often as feels comfortable, but if they don’t feel comfortable, then stop working them.

If your pregnancy is going overdue and medical induction is threatened, use them for as long and as often as you can, because their cumulative effect can be more powerful than using them just once. You also can try combining points – sometimes this is more effective than using individual ones. Be guided by your feelings when combining points; if they feel powerful, use them, but if they feel strange, don’t. You are joining two different energies together, which may or may not be helpful.

These points help to focus your body and your baby on getting ready for labour, as well as supporting the process of labour itself



As “induction” points they are very effective. There are many reasons why mothers don’t go into labour. For some mothers, fear or anxiety keeps them from going into labour, while others are simply too busy to focus on labour and haven’t had the time to prepare. Still others enjoy being pregnant and don’t want the experience to end.

Using the points helps by balancing both emotional and physical energies to encourage labour to begin.

Using the points in labour

Some mothers find some of these points helpful for pain relief during labour because they are allowing energy to flow. In labour, they can be used as long and as often as the mother wants, which could be for the whole of labour or for short periods only. A mother may just want one of the points to be held for hours, or she may want different points stimulated at different stages. I give indications of the effects of different points, but they are all potentially helpful at any stage of labour, both to help labour flow and to ease discomfort. The best way to use them is to try them out: you are not going to cause any harm by using the “wrong” point. That point will simply not feel right, so just stop using it and there will be no adverse effects. Often a mother will find that at least one of the points help her body to focus and get on with what it needs to do, and that’s why I prefer to call them labour focus points.

As well as helping to focus your body and your baby on getting ready for labour, these points also support the process of labour itself. Because they don’t put anything into your body and are simply working to balance your energy, you can use them alongside drugs if necessary, as there will be no interaction. You can use them when preparing for labour, for pain relief during labour, to help move on a prolonged labour and



to strengthen ineffectual contractions. They will also help deliver a retained placenta, or simply deliver a placenta without the use of drugs.

Remember, use the points as often and as long as feels right for you, but if they don’t feel right, then stop using them.

Locating and working the points

The following instructions are intended to guide the birth partner when massaging the mother.

Once you have found the point, it is often easiest to work into it with your thumb, but make sure that the rest of your hand is comfortable. It is often good to wrap the other fingers around the area you are working. You can work both points at the same time – there is one on each limb – or you can work one point at a time. If you are working one point, place your free hand on another area of the mother’s body where it feels comfortable and reassuring. Do what feels best for the mother, but do work both sides at some time, even if you work more one side than the other.

Try working the points in the different birth positions so you can feel comfortable and work

out the best position for you. It really isn’t possible to say how long you should work the points for because different mothers respond differently. However, you will probably need to work them for at least a minute to get an effect and be able to tell whether or not it is a good point to work.

Some mothers don’t feel anything to start with and with these women, you have to hold the point for longer. However, if your partner continues to not feel anything, then either you are on the wrong point, so re-check the location, or you just need to keep holding for a little longer. If she still can’t feel anything after a

couple of minutes, then this probably isn’t a point that is going to help her:

After some time, the mother will feel she has had enough. Before labour, this might be after just a few minutes, but if she is nearly ready to go into labour, then she might like to have it worked for as long as 20 minutes or more.

During labour, some mothers find they really do want the points held for hours. However, others may find that they don’t want any more after 5 or 10 minutes, but then a few hours or minutes later, they want the point worked again.

PERINEAL MASSAGE

This is something that is not for everyone, but if you can do it, it will help you feel less self-conscious about the stretching of your perineum in the second stage. Using massage to prepare your perineum for labour will not only ready it for the huge amount of stretching it has to do during labour but also help you to feel more connected and hopefully less afraid of what is going to happen.

You can begin to do this from about 32-34 weeks of pregnancy. You could even get your partner to do it.

The exercise

- Lubricate your fingers well with oil. Any vegetable oil will be good, but do not use a petroleum-based oil.
- Rub enough oil onto the outside of the perineum to allow your fingers to move smoothly. The oil also feeds the skin and makes it more supple.
- Use your fingers to stretch out the perineum’s skin in different directions: from the middle to the outside, up, down, and up and down together.
- Oil your index finger or your thumb thoroughly. You may need to try both to see which suits you best.
- Place your finger or thumb inside your vagina up to

the second knuckle. Gently massage the vagina in a rhythmic U-shaped movement. This will gently stretch the vaginal tissues and muscles.

- When you are confident and comfortable, increase the pressure and introduce a stretch downwards. This should sting slightly – this same stinging sensation occurs when the baby’s head is born.

Caution Do not do any perineal massage if you have vaginal herpes, thrush or any other vaginal infection. The massage could worsen and spread the infection.

WORKING THE LABOUR FOCUS POINTS

**1 SPLEEN 6 (SP6) Earth Point**

This point is often used by non-pregnant women for easing period pains because it regulates earth energies and has a strong effect on muscle tone. Earth, water and wood energies converge there, and these are all important elemental energies in labour.

Working this point may help change your baby's position and be useful for regulating uterine bleeding. It also has a strong toning and stimulating effect on the uterus. In Japan, it is often used on a regular basis during the whole of the last three months to strengthen the uterus. It really is worth trying this point at any stage of labour, as well as before it.

Place the tip of your little finger on top of the anklebone of the opposite leg, fingers pointing to the front of the leg. SP6 will then lie beneath the second joint of your forefinger, under the shin and three thumb-widths above the tip of the ankle bone.

**2 LIVER 3 (LV3) Wood Point**

The emotion associated with wood is anger; when emotions are suppressed, it is often wood energy that gets stuck. Working this point is very good for clearing blocked wood energy – either by bringing more energy into the body or by taking an excess away – and can help you release emotions and become more in touch with what you are feeling both before and during labour.

Suppressed emotions often may block going into labour as well as the movement from first to second stage labour, so this can be a good point to use during transition. It can, however, be used at any stage in labour and is also good to support the flow of wood energy in the second stage, so you can birth your baby. Working the point may help release tension in the shoulders and neck and so is helpful for headaches, which can be common in labour, and is often useful if the mother finds pressure on the neck and shoulder points too intense.

This point lies on top of the foot between the first and second toes, one-and-a-half to two thumb-widths back from the margin of the web.

**3 GALL BLADDER 21 (GB21) Wood Point**

Pressure on this point can be incorporated into a shoulder massage to relax tension in the shoulder, neck and jaw and to help with the opening of the mouth and the perineum during second stage labour.

Because it seems to be linked with the release of oxytocin – the hormone involved in the third stage – this point is particularly good to help with the delivery of the placenta. Many midwives I have shown this point to have used it to avoid having to remove the placenta surgically, when it has refused to come out.

The point lies in the hollow on top of the shoulder, straight up from the nipple when you are standing. It is in the highest point of the muscle on the shoulder. An accurate way is to measure from the seventh cervical vertebra out along the neck.

**4 LARGE INTESTINE 4 (LI4) Metal Point**

This point is known as the “great eliminator” and is often used to relieve pain. This can be especially useful if the mother is feeling sick or has diarrhea, which is often the case leading up to labour, and even during labour itself. It also is good for headaches.

It is situated on the back of hand, between the thumb and forefinger. To locate it, have the thumb and index finger closed: the point is at the highest spot of the muscle.

Alternatively, stretch the thumb and the index finger. The point is then midway between the junction of the first and second finger bones and the border of the web, slightly towards the second finger bone.

5 BLADDER 60 (BL60) Fire & Water Point

The fire (heart) point on the bladder (water energy) meridian has the useful effect of clearing heat and excess energy, especially from the head. The point activates the whole length of the bladder meridian, so it can help ease any tightness in the head, spine and legs. It has a strong downward effect and is very useful for inducing and strengthening labour contractions, and for the expulsion of the placenta.

The point lies in the hollow midway between the knob of the anklebone on the outside of ankle and the outer Achilles tendon of the foot.