

# Birth Care & Family Health Services

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## The Final Weeks

### Promoting Sleep

At the point in your life when you need the most sleep, it can be hard to get. Pregnancy-related aches and pains are usually the reason. The 3<sup>rd</sup> trimester is the worst trimester when it comes to sleep. Heartburn, an increased need to urinate, nasal stuffiness, leg cramps and difficulty finding a comfortable position make it hard to rest.

The best way to manage to sleep disturbances in late pregnancy is to practice good “sleep hygiene” — stick to regular sleep schedule, avoid daytime naps, exercise regularly, and avoid caffeine within six hours of bedtime. A cup of chamomile tea with milk and a warm bath can relax you and get you ready for sleep.

When it comes to getting comfortable, the most comfortable sleep position also happens to be the one that maximizes blood flow to your baby: lying on your side. Remember that pregnant women can never have too many pillows. It may also help to have separate bed covers from your partner as most moms-to-be get pretty warm during the night. Some women find they can only rest in a recliner rather than a bed. That's fine, too —whatever gets you through the night!

### Exercise

It is most healthy to stay active throughout the entire pregnancy, including these final weeks when it may feel hard to get off the couch! A gentle exercise program will help the end of your pregnancy be more comfortable, will help you rest more easily, and may make for an easier labor and birth. As throughout your pregnancy, walking, swimming, yoga, riding a stationary bike and low-impact aerobics are the best exercise choices. Even if you simply add one extra 15-minute walk each day and a 10 minute gentle stretch session, your body will thank you. Do listen to your body: go gently and stop if anything hurts. Drink plenty of water and do not get overheated. Gentle exercise can relieve backache, prevent muscle pain and tension, and prevent both varicose veins and hemorrhoids. It can improve your energy and mood, too.

### Physical Preparation for Labor

Some women like to use herbs and natural remedies to promote labor in hope that they might avoid going overdue. Alternatively, some women trust that their body knows just when to give birth without help. If you are interested in herbal techniques, here are some ideas. Please talk with your midwives about further questions.

**Red Raspberry Leaf Tea:** drink as much as you like. Also wonderful during labor.

**Calcium-Magnesium Supplement:** Helps your body prepare for effective labor. Take 2 tablets (500-1000mg) twice a day.

**Evening Primrose Oil:** 1000 mg by mouth morning and evening from 37 weeks on. You can also help to ripen the cervix and soften the tissue by putting 1000mg as far back into the vagina as possible at bed time.

**Sexual Intercourse:** is another natural way to help the cervix ripen for labor and is safe.

### Medjool Dates:

Well done research studies have shown benefits to pregnant women who eat Medjool Dates. For example, compared to women who did not eat dates, women who ate six date fruits per day for 4 weeks prior to their due date:

- Were more dilated upon labor admission
- Were much less likely to have their water bags break before labor had started
- Were much less likely to need to be induced or have labor augmented with medication
- Were much less likely to have a long, slow, tiring “pre labor”

Eating dates during labor has also been shown to reduce vomiting, increase energy, and shorten the length of pushing.

Another large study also showed that eating dates significantly reduced the amount of bleeding after birth. In fact, immediately after delivery, eating a few dates worked better than a shot of pitocin to prevent or control hemorrhage.