

How to use Birthing Balls

1. Ball Size

Size is important! When sitting on the ball, the hips should be higher than or level with the knees. If the hips are lower than the knees, it means the ball is too small for sitting on. This position will prevent the spine from extending, forcing the back to be rounded, which will reduce the efficiency of the breathing, cause backache and prevent the baby from moving into the Optimum Foetal Position by reducing the angle between the maternal pelvis and the spine.



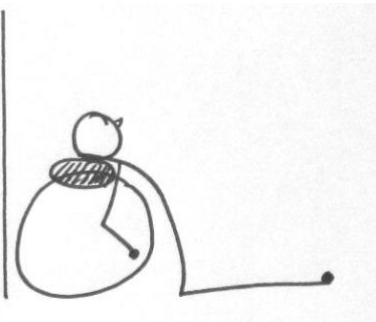
Ideal Ball size for height: up to 5'3" = 55cm
5'4" – 5'10" = 65cm
5'10" and taller = 75cm

2. Ball Type

A Birthing Ball *is* a gym ball/exercise ball/swiss ball. Sometimes they just cost more if they are a designated 'birthing ball'. The most important thing to recommend is that the ball is BURST PROOF or ANTI-BURST. Some of the cheaper balls are made of thin rubber. A new ball may not inflate up to full size initially as the rubber will need to stretch. Bounce around on it for about a day, then try to inflate a little bit more.

3. Using the Ball for Comfort during Pregnancy

Birthing balls can be really useful towards the end of pregnancy when it seems impossible for Mums to get comfortable. I recommend Mums to sit or lean back over the ball as an alternative to sitting on the sofa, as it will help to encourage the baby into the OFP.



Seated Support

Place the ball against a wall for support. Lean back, supporting the head with a pillow or two.

- Helps to open chest, relaxes shoulders & deepens the breath.
- Alleviates any stretching pains in the upper abdomen.
- Alleviates feelings of breathlessness and can help heartburn.
- Gives a wonderful stretch to the spine, back, shoulder girdle and chest.



All Fours

- Relieves backache, particularly any strain on the lumbar.
- Relaxes uterine ligaments
- Keeps good spinal alignment
- Excellent for Optimum Foetal Positioning
- Use instead of the sofa for watching TV etc.
- Move, rock and sway the body in whatever way feels comfortable.



Centred Sitting

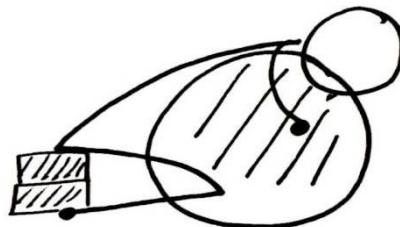
- Try to sit slightly forward of the centre, feet firmly on the floor
- Engages and works Core Muscles and Pelvic Girdle Muscles
- Encourages good alignment of the maternal spine
- In late pregnancy is more comfortable than traditional furniture

Micro Moves

- Make circles with hips. Start small and gradually increase to large circles – go clockwise and anti-clockwise.

Relaxation

Lean into the ball for support and relax fully into it. Widen the knees to 'grip' around the ball. Make sure you are sitting on some blocks and/or cushions to avoid compressing the blood vessels in the legs. A pillow under the chest or head may also provide more comfort.



MIDWIFE TIP: Bouncing gently on your Ball may help to induce labour when the time is right.

4. Using the Birthing Ball during Labour

During labour, it is useful to sit or kneel over the ball and move the hips around. The rhythmical, circular movements help to dissipate the pain and provide a focal point, as well as encouraging cervical dilation. The best moves are:-



Hip Circles – draw circles with the hips, going in both directions, large and small



Hip Swings – swinging hips from left to right



Figure of 8 – move hips into a figure of 8, in both directions, front to back and hip to hip



All Fours

- Increases the efficiency of the Contractions
- Reduces discomfort
- Helps the Cervix to open
- Increases circulation to the pelvis
- The ball is extremely comfortable, soft and supportive
- Good position for Birth Partner to massage the sacrum
- In addition to hip circles, it is useful to rock forwards and backwards



Sitting

- Reduces discomfort
- Helps the Cervix to open
- Increases circulation to the pelvis
- Lets gravity do the work
- Time spent sitting on the ball during labour will be limited due to the pressure on the cervix and birth canal as labour progresses.

Lunge

- Rock hips forwards and backwards
- Changes the angle of the pelvis
- Helps to move 'stuck' babies
- Helps the baby descend more easily
- Useful if baby is 'back to back'/posterior

