

Learning how to push

DURING THE SECOND, OR ACTIVE, PHASE OF labor, uterine contractions push the baby out—with your help. Yet pushing doesn't come naturally. Most women push incorrectly—holding their breath and bearing down. "This actually slows labor by tensing the muscles in the pelvic floor," says Julie Tupler, R.N., founder of the New York City-based Maternal Fitness, an exercise program that teaches basic labor skills. "It also may cause dangerous changes in maternal and fetal heart rate and blood pressure." What you need to practice: continuing to breathe while pushing the abdomen back toward the spine, using the transverse muscle. This massages the uterus directly and keeps the pelvic floor relaxed.

To train your transverse—the innermost abdominal muscle, which wraps around your waist like a wide belt—sit and inhale, expanding your belly as you breathe. Exhale and bring your navel back toward your spine, hold for a count of 30 and release. As you exercise, place one hand on your back next to your spine so you can feel the muscle working. A more advanced form of this exercise: Begin as before (inhale, expand belly, and exhale, bringing navel as close as you can to the back of your spine). Then "pulse" the muscle by releasing it *halfway*; bring navel back to spine and repeat. For each exercise, start with 25 repetitions and work up to 100 a day. Count out loud to ensure that you're not holding your breath.

Vitamin update

LAST SEPTEMBER THE U.S. PUBLIC HEALTH Service recommended that all women of childbearing age take extra folic acid, to prevent birth defects of the spinal cord. Neural Tube Defects (NTDs) kill or disable more than 2,500 infants each year. Here's what else you should know: ● *You need adequate folic acid even if you're not yet pregnant.* NTDs originate when the embryonic brain and spine are developing, less than a week after the first missed menstrual period—when many women do not even yet know they're pregnant. ● *You probably don't need to take additional folic acid.* If you meet the current U.S. recommended daily allowance—0.4 milligrams—you will be getting enough. (The Public Health recommendation is the same as the USRDA.) If you eat a bowl of cereal or one cup of spinach or broccoli every day, you're probably getting close to what you need. Don't overdose—too much folic acid can mask pernicious anemia, a sign of vitamin B-12 deficiency. If undetected, this deficiency can lead to maternal nerve damage. Consult your doctor before supplementing your diet. ● *If you do need more, you don't necessarily need to get it from a vitamin supplement.* Folic acid is plentiful in such foods as leafy green vegetables, asparagus, strawberries, cantaloupe, citrus fruits and juice, bread and fortified breakfast cereals. However, your doctor may recommend a supplement (typically, a prenatal multivitamin) if your dietary intake is low.



Fussy-baby guilt

IF YOUR BABY IS FUSSY, IT'S NOT YOUR fault. "Many new parents gauge their parenting competence by how long their baby cries or how easily they can soothe her. Actually, an infant's behavior reflects individual differences in how well she copes with change," says Barbara Medoff-Cooper, Ph.D., associate professor at the University of Pennsylvania School of Nursing. It will take a few months for fretful, hard-to-soothe babies to learn how to calm themselves, but rarely do such traits persist or affect future behavior. You can defuse fussiness by watching your baby and learning her distinct style, particularly in the following trouble zones.

- *Cuddling:* Does she like to be snuggled in your arms or wrapped in a blanket? Held tightly or put into a baby carrier?
- *Soothing:* Does she prefer music to a voice? Stroking to rocking? Her hand to a pacifier?
- *Feeding:* Does she nurse better in a well-lit or dim room? Alone or with others present? Does she nod off or need extra comforting after a feeding?
- *Adjusting:* Will she accept a variety of people caring for her or just one? Can she nap anywhere or only in one spot?
- *Sleeping:* Does she prefer to be placed on one side or the other? With a pacifier or not? In darkness or gentle lighting?

Get a jump on spring

THESE THREE BASICS WILL GO THE distance—giving you fit and flattering from earliest pregnancy through the first months of motherhood. Floral print bolero, \$56, T-shirt, \$56, and stirrup catsuit with body-skimming inverted pleats, \$98, all of cotton/Lycra spandex from JWO. To order or for store information, call (415) 621-0555.

LIFESAVER: Safety to go

"IN MY BABY'S DIAPER BAG, I KEEP PHONE numbers for my pediatrician and the local poison-control center. I also carry a bottle of syrup of ipecac [to induce vomiting in children older than ten months], replacing it regularly to keep it up to date. Wherever we are, if there's an emergency and I'm directed to induce vomiting, I'm prepared."

Lisa LePine, Waukesha, Wisconsin

If you have a solution to a problem of your pregnancy or mothering, share it with us! Write Glamour Pregnancy Lifesaver, 350 Madison Ave., New York NY 10017.