



# Info-paper

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## Active Birth – 8 Big Benefits for Mother and Baby

By [Fiona Peacock](#) in [Birth](#). Updated: June 10, 2018

During an active birth, the mother-to-be is encouraged to **move around freely** and choose positions that feel comfortable to her.

Though it may be a relatively common sight in a hospital birth ward, mothers having active births are **unlikely to lie on their backs to birth their babies.**

Throughout history and across the world, women **have been giving birth in upright positions.**

However, it's believed to be **King Louis XIV** who made a massive impact on future generations of childbirth.

He apparently insisted that his wives should lie down on a table, so he could get a better view of the birth. *(ROON & RICE understand that King Louis 14 of France had 33 mistresses, and his joy was to watch his mistresses give birth. As he could not do this when women were giving birth in the natural position (upright, kneeling, squatting) he forced them on a table. This later became the hospital bed where women give birth the traditional way, in the supine position).*

So, birthing on your back was born. That was until women eventually fought back *(ROON & RICE: This fight now is GLOBAL, just like the fight against modern slavery, or the fight against the use of pesticides, fungicides, herbicides that make whole populations sick or the fight against food producers who focus on cheap production, good taste=good sales, high salts and sugars content and take the "health issue" as a restriction.)* from this painful, physiologically dysfunctional way of giving birth, which can result in the pelvis losing up to 30% of its capacity to open up for birth.

The active birth movement started off as a way of giving women their power back. *In a world where labour was controlled by medical professionals (ROON & RICE: We can see this in government hospitals, and see this is not the case for private (more expensive) hospitals),* the active birth movement encouraged women to take control of their births. Instead of being told what to do, women are encouraged to do *whatever feels the most comfortable.*

The term 'active birth' was coined by *Janet Balaskas* in the 1980s. As an antenatal teacher, Janet taught women relaxation techniques and breathing exercises to use during labour. Through research, Janet discovered that women in other cultures didn't lie on their backs to give birth. In fact they squatted, knelt and stood, surrounded by supportive women.

In Western society, most women still give birth on their backs. That said, the active birth movement is gaining in popularity, and *many healthcare professionals are now aware of the benefits of giving birth*

in upright positions (ROON&RICE: Interestingly we see that the group of professionals that spends the most time with the pregnant mother before and after birth (the Nurse) is generally in favor of Active Birth. She sees the damage done by traditional birthing method (Supine position, oxytocin, epidural and unnecessary C-section) so she understands that active birth or vertical position or reducing pain by training and well informing the pregnant mother actually WORK!. However...the doctor is the big boss, and we do not go against the doctor). For this reason, many birth centres now have a number of props in the rooms to allow women to move around and change position during labour. From birthing stools, balls and cushions to allow for comfortable sitting and kneeling positions, to ropes to assist with a squatting position. Many birth centres have water pools which allow women to labour and give birth in water. The water provides support and buoyancy which allows the women to change position easily in the pool.

## **8 Benefits Of An Active Birth**

There are a number of significant, research backed reasons to choose active birth, including:

### **#1: Reduced Risk of Medical Interventions**

In 2012, a [study](#) found that upright positions during the second stage of labour was associated with a significant decrease in the use of interventions. The study also found that the pelvis opens up when the woman is in a squatting or hands and knee position, allowing more room for the baby to travel through.

### **#2: Shorter Labour Time**

In 2009, a [research review](#) found that giving birth in an upright position was associated with a shorter first stage of labour. The study found that women who gave birth in an upright position had first stages that were approximately one hour shorter. The use of doulas have also been proven to result in a shorter labour. This is likely partly due to the fact that they support women to have active labours.

### **#3: Less Painful Labour**

Women who give birth lying down are more likely to have epidurals, but those labouring in an upright position are more likely to cope with the pain. A [2009 study](#) found that labouring in an upright position was associated with lower levels of pain during labour. Labouring on your back has been shown to result in a more painful labour.

### **#4: A More Satisfying Labour**

A [study](#) in 2009 found that women who laboured in an upright position felt more satisfied with their birth experience overall. Again, this finding is similar to those who use doulas.

### **#5: Better Oxygen Flow To The Baby**

Being in an upright position allows for a better flow of blood to the baby. Lying down on your back can lead to a reduced flow of blood to the baby. Compressed blood and oxygen supply can cause fetal distress, resulting in further interventions.

### **#6: Makes The Most Of Gravity**

It makes sense to utilise gravity during labour. Pushing in an upright position allows gravity to do its job and help the baby travel down through the birth canal. Whereas, in a lying down position, you have gravity working against you.

### **#7: A Woman's Partner Will Feel More Involved**

During an active labour, a birth partner feels like he or she is actively participating in supporting the mother-to-be. This creates a rewarding, bonding experience – teamwork – which can then set the scene and filters through into parenthood.

### **#8: May Result In Less Trauma To The Baby**

Because an active birth can result in fewer interventions, less likelihood of stress to the baby or a longer than necessary labour, your baby stands to experience a more trauma free birth. Of course,

there are no guarantees, but active birth certainly helps to keep birth normal for both mother and baby.

### **Setting The Scene For An Active Birth**

Active birth isn't about rules, it's about doing what feels right at the time. You should move into positions that feel comfortable and try to stay active throughout labour. But the most important aspect is that you are comfortable and relaxed.

In order to move freely and feel comfortable in your surroundings, you need to be in an environment that makes you feel safe. Bright lights and a lack of privacy are not conducive to an active birth. Turn the lights down and surround yourself with supportive people to help you relax.

Feeling relaxed and comfortable during labour allows your body to do its job properly. Your body needs to produce lots of oxytocin and endorphins during labour and will only be able to do so if you feel safe and relaxed. These hormones will help you to manage the pain, focus on the birth and feel even more relaxed.

### **How To Have An Active Birth**

So, how can you achieve an active birth? Here are 5 tips:

#### **#1: Choose A Supportive Healthcare Provider**

Speak to your healthcare provider early on about your desire to have an active birth. Ask questions about their experience in this area, and what steps they would take to help you realise this dream. If they seem unsupportive, look into other healthcare providers who may be better able to get on board with your vision. [Here](#) are 11 questions to ask an ob gyn before hiring them.

#### **#2: Decide Where You Want To Give Birth**

If you are having a low risk pregnancy, you should be able to choose where you give birth. You could give birth at your local hospital, at a

nearby birth centre or in the comfort of your own home. Have a look at all of your options (even if you're unsure about some), and ask the staff to show you the birth facilities. Many birth centres now have birthing stools, balls, ropes and pools as well as other props to encourage women to stay active during labour. Your local hospital may also have some of these props, so be sure to ask questions when you take a look round. If you choose to give birth at home, your household furniture will become your birthing props! You may also like to hire or buy a birthing pool for your home birth.

### **#3: Attend Prenatal Classes**

Prenatal classes often focus on active birth and discuss upright and active positions for labour and birth. Your prenatal classes are tailored to those in attendance, so make sure you speak up about your desire to have an active birth. There are also active birth classes you can attend to try out different positions and learn more about how to have an active birth. Read about why BellyBelly encourages women and their partners to attend non-hospital based birth classes.

### **#4: Stay Active During Pregnancy**

Labour is a marathon, and without any training it's little wonder that some women end up lying on their backs in bed. Regular exercise throughout pregnancy can help to improve your stamina and general fitness so that you'll be better able to cope during the birth.

### **#5: Get Your Partner On Board**

Your partner has an active role to play in helping you to achieve your vision of what the birth should look like. In an active birth, your partner can help you to move position, and support your weight in certain positions. By holding you up and letting you rest on him, he can help to make the birth a little bit easier. Ask your partner to read up about positions in advance so that he can support you on the day.

## **New Active Birth – Get The Book To Learn Even More!**

Janet Balaskas' MUST read book for all pregnant women and their partners is New Active Birth.

([https://www.bookdepository.com/book/9780722525661?a\\_aid=bellybelly](https://www.bookdepository.com/book/9780722525661?a_aid=bellybelly))

This is one of a few essential recommended reads BellyBelly suggests to all pregnant women. You'll be so glad you read it – it goes way beyond most pregnancy and birth books on the market.