

Acupressure for Pain Relief in Labour

Optimising your bodies beneficial responses

My use of acupressure began in 1992 when, as an acupuncturist with a young child, I was unable to guarantee being available to attend labours. I instructed support people on how to stimulate the acupuncture points I would have used, thinking it might be useful. Surprisingly the feedback from women and midwives indicated acupressure had similar benefits to that of acupuncture and led to a free booklet being published online in 1996. Subsequently benefits continue to be reported. With research reporting acupressure reduced the incidence of caesarean sections.⁽¹⁾ Acupressure has also been reported to significantly reduce the need for epidurals and caesarean sections when used as part of a complimentary antenatal intervention.⁽²⁾

From feedback my 'top tip's for using these acupressure points in labour would be:

- Your support people do not need to be good at massage! They just need to follow your feedback to apply firm continuous pressure you find comfortable.
- Start using these points early in labour and experiment with which points you prefer
- The pressure and points you find the most useful are likely to change as you progress through labour
- You will notice beneficial effects during the contractions – if the pressure feels painful or irritating, they are not the right points for you at this time in your labour.

Below are links to short videos discussing point location. There are also suggestions for their use that come from my experiences, feedback from women and midwives using acupressure. Further information on using acupressure from 36 weeks as labour preparation, for assisting induction of labour as well as acustimulation techniques you can use on yourself can be found at <https://acupuncture.rhizome.net.nz/acupressure/>.

For Pain relief in labour

GB 21



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XjuQadqgkY8>

BL 32



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vmIHAIsoTyY>

The Buttock Point



KID 1



Comb



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F4RhGqBSP4k>

LI 4



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cKxBsmKDvSA>

For Specific Issues

To promote cervical ripening

SP 6



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MdK61TSSKD4>

To establish contractions

LI 4



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cKxBsmKDvSA>

Support people: please note that each point can be stimulated for 1-2 minutes every ½ hour in early labour for: a woman having their first baby, those receiving a medical induction or a previous labour where there were issues with cervical ripening or establishing contractions

For nausea

This point can be held or stimulated with a 'sea sickness' band

PC 6



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r1tFzdEGT7A>

If your baby is in a posterior position

Depending on access to the points BL 60 and SP 6 can be used by holding for a minute on each leg or one leg. BL 67 can be tapped for a minute with a fingernail or end of a pen to stimulate.

BL 60



SP 6



BL 67



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QC0ucLYpjF8>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y-SHFxdSkRc>

Points useful to try in the transition stage of labour

KID 1



BL 60



LI 4



Support people: please note that women report these points totally changing their experience of transition. Midwives also report women becoming calm and focused when support people began using one of these points.

To assist the baby to move down into the pelvis and to encourage effective pushing

GB 21



Support people: Please note midwives have reported this point can be useful in a woman having their first baby or first experience of the second stage of labour.

To encourage effective placental release after the baby has been born

GB 21



LI 4



BL 60



For 'after pains'
SP 6



To encourage let down
GB 21



Support people: Please note that afterpains that occur as breastfeeding commences may be mild when a woman has her first baby, they can be stronger than the contractions experienced during labour for subsequent babies. The stimulation of GB 21 can be useful to encourage let down as the milk comes in (day 2-3), or earlier if women had difficulty with breastfeeding previously or have had a Caesarean section

Further information is available:

<http://acupuncture.rhizome.net.nz/acupressure/>

<https://www.udemy.com/acupressure-for-labour/?couponCode=ACUPRESSURE25>

Phone app: <https://itunes.apple.com/gb/app/acupressure-for-natural-pain/id604942630>

References

- 1 Smith CA, Collins CT, Levett KM, Armour M, Dahlen HG, Tan AL, Mesgarpour B. (2020) Acupuncture or acupressure for pain management during labour. Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews 2020, Issue 2. Art. No.: CD009232. DOI: 10.1002/14651858.CD009232.pub2
- 2 Levett KM, Smith CA, Bensoussan A & Dahlen HG. (2016). Complementary therapies for labour and birth study: a randomised controlled trial of antenatal integrative medicine for pain management in labour. *BMJ Open*, 2016 Jul 12;6(7):e010691. DOI: 10.1136/bmjopen-2015-010691.

Please reference all images <https://acupuncture.rhizome.net.nz/acupressure/>

Self-stimulating Acupuncture points for Pain Relief in Labour

Optimising your bodies beneficial responses

Although many of acupressure techniques on this website involve support people stimulating the acupuncture points, I have also received positive feedback from women who used these points on themselves.

In these unprecedented times when you may be facing restricted choices about who can be present during your labour, please find below my suggestions for how you can still achieve beneficial acupressure stimulation.

Further information on using acupressure to prepare for labour and what to do if you require a medical induction can be found <https://acupuncture.rhizome.net.nz/acupressure/>

For Pain relief in labour

Comb pressure on the Palm of your hand



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F4RhGqBSP4k>

LI 4



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cKxBsmKDv>

The use of a comb to apply pressure on the palm of your hand where it meets your fingers was adapted from a Russian article using combs on women's feet during labour! Using a comb and applying pressure to LI 4 are techniques frequently reported by women as beneficial in early labour.

BL 32



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vmIHaisOtyY>

The Buttock Point



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XpuSAqPee1S>

Women have reported using the knuckle or thumb of one hand during contractions reduced the intensity and enabled them to continue tasks such as preparing meals, and in one case helping her husband set up the birthing pool! Women have also used these points by using tennis ball against a wall to lean back into during a contraction

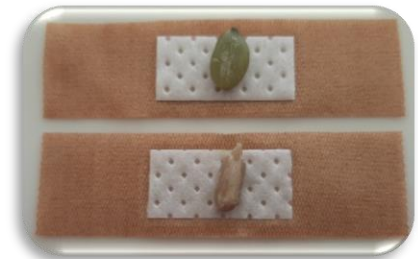
GB 21



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XjuQadqgkY8>

Women have reported using GB 21 on themselves at home as they carry on with daily activities, as a useful point when they are in the bath and when in the car travelling to hospital.

KID 1



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ry82TMPk7JE>

Women have also reported how pleasant it was to wear sea sickness bands with the 'button' applying pressure to KID 1 as they move around in early labour and then squat in the second stage. If you do not have sea sickness bands, you could use a pumpkin or sesame seed on a plaster/tape as illustrated above. Please note that whatever you use to apply pressure it should feel pleasant and discontinued if it feels painful or uncomfortable.

SP 6



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MdK61TSSKD4>

This point can be self-stimulated by using an almond on a plaster over the point and stimulating this with your heel as in the illustration. This point often elicits a strong achy sensation which is desired, but please reduce the pressure if it feels too uncomfortable!



You can stimulate SP 6 and BL 67 in labour to encourage optimal positioning

This may be practically relevant if you have a baby in a posterior position or with a deflexed head

SP 6



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MdK61TSSKD4>



As above SP 6 can be stimulated with an almond on a plaster applied to the point and then stimulated

BL 67



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y-SHFxdSkRc>



BL 67 can be stimulated with a pepper corn on a plaster applied and wrapped around the little toe. This can then be tapped with the heel of your other foot.

These points can be stimulated between contractions for 1-2 mins. While not all babies are able to turn if useful your contractions should become more regular and you will experience reduced back pain.

I welcome any feedback you may have from using these techniques Debra.betts@rhizome.net.nz

Further information is available:

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Birth Preparation using Acupressure

Optimising your bodies beneficial responses

Acupressure can be used from 36 weeks to encourage beneficial hormonal responses for labour preparation and encourage the baby to move into an optimal position. Recent research reports reduced caesarean sections when acupressure is used in labour ⁽¹⁾ and acupressure has also been reported to significantly reduce the need for epidurals and caesarean sections when used as part of a complimentary antenatal intervention. ⁽²⁾

This worksheet outlines how you can use acupressure as “homework” for labour preparation from 36 weeks and when you have a time limit for the onset on labour.

The acupressure labour preparation techniques below can be used from 36 weeks, 3 times a week, increasing at 38 weeks to every 2- 3 days until labour commences.

Further information on point location and use during labour, including techniques to stimulate these points for yourself, can be found in additional handouts at <https://acupuncture.rhizome.net.nz/acupressure/>

Acupressure as Labour preparation: From 36 weeks. Massage (5 mins each channel)

GB 21



BL 32



SP 6



KID 1



LIV 3

- Start from the top of the neck and massage towards the shoulder tip, releasing any tight areas as you pass through GB 21.
- Start above BL 32 and massage towards the sacrum and out over the buttocks to release any tight areas.
- Start at the shin bone on the inner leg and massage in small circles with the thumb to the side of the Tibia bone passing through SP 6 until you reach the calf muscles. Only work to the level of comfort as this point may be tender.
- Holding KID 1 with an index finger, place thumb on top of foot and massage up the space between the big toe and second toe until you reach bone.

If you know you have a baby in a posterior position you can add tapping to BL 67 as discussed in the next section

Labour Preparation for VBAC, Medical induction or for Rupture of Membranes

When you have a time limit for the onset on labour you can 'step up' the acupressure stimulation. Increasing the pressure so that there is specific pressure on the acupressure points as per the acupressure use during labour worksheet. This can be used so that the GB 21 and BL 32 are stimulated at least twice a day for 5 mins each and LI 4, SP 6 and BL 67 points every 2 hours. BL 67 can be used through tapping with a fingernail or pen end for 1 min each toe. This can be 3-4 days before your date for a VBAC, a scheduled medical induction, however if your membranes have ruptured you can commence immediately.

GB 21



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XjuQadqgkY8>

BL 32



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vmlHAisOtyY>

LI 4



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cKxBsmKDv>

SP 6



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MdK61TSSKD4>

BL 67



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y-SHFxdSkRc>

It is recommended that if you do not have a medical time limit for the onset of labour only labour preparation techniques are used. Although the use of the acupressure points as above may stimulate the onset of contractions, this has the potential to result in a labour that does not proceed in the same way as it would have with spontaneous onset. In part this may be because optimal maternal hormonal levels are only reached a few days before the onset of spontaneous labour, and this is also a time when physiological processes for the baby, including reduced amniotic fluid within their lungs and the production of surfactant (related lung function and thought to trigger the onset of labour), take place. It is therefore ideal even when reaching the 'magic 40' weeks to allow as many days as possible for these beneficial processes to occur before labour commences.

Further information on these acupressure points are available:

<http://acupuncture.rhizome.net.nz/acupressure/>

<https://www.udemy.com/acupressure-for-labour/?couponCode=ACUPRESSURE25>

Phone app: <https://itunes.apple.com/gb/app/acupressure-for-natural-pain/id604942630>

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Online TeleHealth consultations available <https://acupuncture.rhizome.net.nz/about-debra/>