



A HELPFUL GUIDE TO

Acupressure for Labor Preparation

SARAH TEWHEY L.Ac

WHAT IS ACUPRESSURE FOR LABOR PREPARATION?

Acupressure is the application of massage or pressure to specific points on the body. It can be used daily in the final weeks of pregnancy to help prepare for birth and can be used during labor for pain relief. Acupressure is a safe, low cost and helpful intervention that can be performed by anyone. It only takes a few minutes to learn and is an excellent addition to the "toolbox" of birthing people and their partners as well as nurses, doulas and midwives.

In the days and weeks leading up to labor, acupuncture and acupressure are used to promote cervical readiness, provide stress relief and emotional support, help baby find the best position for engagement in the pelvis and to coordinate uterine contractions. Points are used in combination, not necessarily to simply "make contractions," but to holistically support the multitude of factors needed for the onset of a labor pattern. The results of regular acupressure for labor preparation are not meant to be sudden and immediate, but to gradually help the body build readiness for labor over time. Acupressure is used to gently support all the processes taking place within the birthing person and the baby that foster a healthy birth.

There is a small but growing body of research around the use of acupressure and acupuncture for labor preparation. Regular acupressure in the weeks prior to labor may improve Bishop score (a measure of cervical readiness for labor) and acupressure has been shown to reduce the need for caesarean section when used in labor. For full summaries of the research on acupressure and acupuncture for labor preparation please see the resources section on the following page.

In a typical pregnancy there are few contraindications for acupressure for labor preparation using the points below and it can be safely performed by anyone using the information in this guide. For specific or complex issues that arise during pregnancy and birth or for treatment ahead of a scheduled medical induction, receiving acupuncture from a trained and licensed professional within the East Asian Medicine field who also has post-graduate training in Perinatal care can also be helpful.

HOW TO PERFORM ACUPRESSURE FOR LABOR PREPARATION:

Acupressure can be performed by the birthing person or by a partner. During each acupressure session choose two to five points. For each point apply steady pressure or gentle massage for three to five minutes. The amount of pressure should be firm, but not uncomfortable and it should not leave a bruise. Each set of bilateral points can be stimulated only one at a time or as a pair.

From 36 to 38 weeks of pregnancy:

Acupressure can be performed one to three times a week.

From 38 to 39 weeks:

Acupressure can be performed three to five times a week.

At 40 weeks and beyond:

Acupressure sessions can be performed daily.

If a medical induction is planned within the next 72 hours or if membranes have ruptured and labor is not starting, acupressure can be performed several times a day and as often as every 2 hours until labor begins. Acupressure can also be used alongside acupuncture treatment and other interventions or medications in the home, birth center or hospital setting.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Acupressure in Pregnancy and Childbirth

Materials and videos by Debra Betts

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

Can Acupuncture or Acupressure help with Prebirth or Labor Induction?

Research Summary by Susan Wallmeyer

<https://www.nychi-acupuncture.com/topic/prebirth-and-labor-induction/>

EBB 125 – Evidence on Acupressure, Acupuncture and Breast Stimulation

Podcast episode from Evidence Based Birth

<https://evidencebasedbirth.com/ebb-125-evidence-on-acupressure-acupuncture-and-breast-stimulation/>

ABOUT SARAH

Sarah Tewhey L.Ac has been practicing in Maine since 2009 and attending births as an acupuncturist and doula since 2011. She is a graduate and guest mentor of the Maternity Acupuncture Mentoring and Peer Support (MAMPS) program and a Senior Member of the Obstetric Acupuncture Association.

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THE POINTS

Spleen 6

This point is located on the inner lower leg, about 3-4 inches above the inner ankle. The point will be tender to pressure. Steady pressure and massage is useful for cervical readiness, strengthening contractions and pain relief during labor.



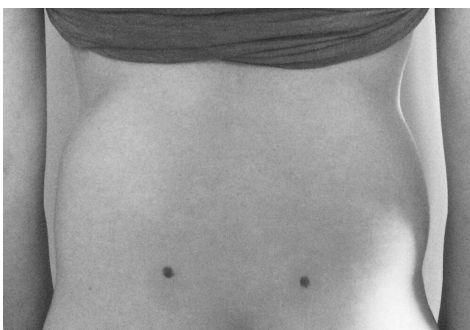
Large Intestine 4

This point is located on the hand, between the bones of the thumb and index finger. The point will be tender to pressure. Steady pressure and massage is useful for strengthening contractions and pain relief during labor.



Urinary Bladder 32

This point is located on the sacrum at the base of the lower back in the divet created by the second hole in the sacrum. The point is usually tender to pressure, but not always. Steady pressure and massage is useful for cervical readiness, strengthening and coordinating contractions and pain relief during labor. This point can be specifically helpful with back labor.



Kidney 1

This point is located on the bottom of the foot, where the ball of the foot meets the arch. Steady pressure and massage is useful for stress and anxiety related to late pregnancy concerns or potential changes in birth plans. This point can also be grounding and calming during intense moments in labor such as transition.



MASSAGE TECHNIQUES

Kidney Channel Chafing

This technique involves rapid directional massage on the foot with the heel of the hand for several minutes. The massage begins on the inside of the foot at the arch and moves under and behind the inner ankle, stopping about 5 inches above the inner ankle. This technique can be done for 3-10 minutes on each side, stopping to rest during contractions. This technique is useful for establishing a steady contraction pattern in early or prodromal ("warm up") labor and in gently providing stamina to the birthing person. It is also useful to strengthen and coordinate contractions during the early part of a medical induction.



Liver Gummies

This technique uses the thumb on the inner edge of the shin bone from the base of the leg to about six inches above the ankle. Beginning at the inner ankle and moving the thumb slowly up the shin, there will likely be tender nodules that feel like pea to nickel sized "gummies" below the skin. Gently massage these areas for several minutes until they soften or dissipate. This area can be tender and sore, so use good communication with the birthing person ensure this technique is performed in a way that isn't too intense. This technique is useful for softening and dilating the cervix, encouraging contractions and relaxing both physical and emotional tension.

