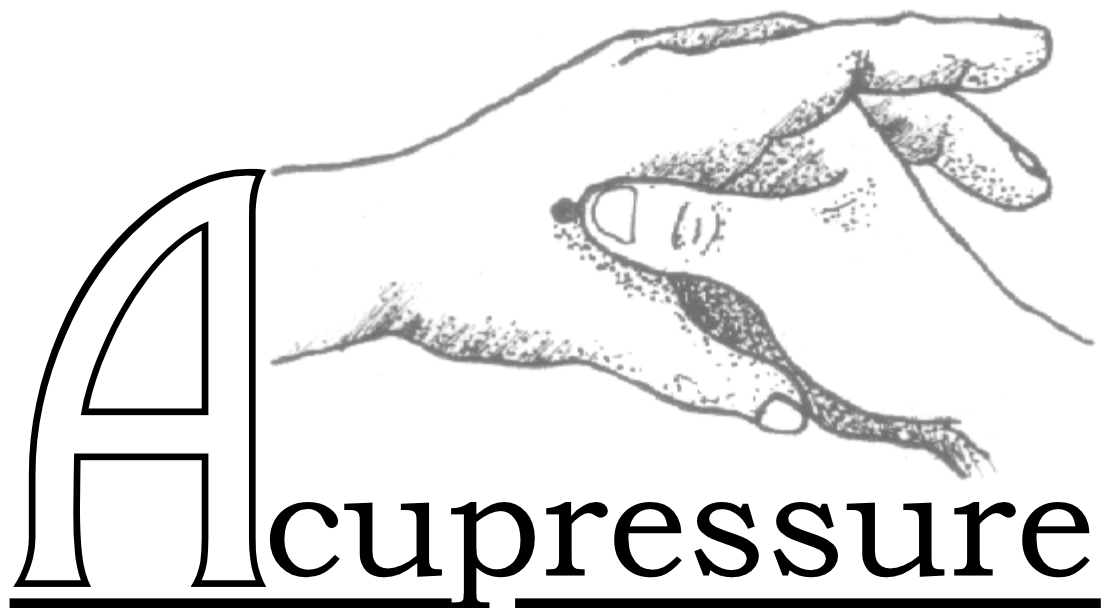


Natural pain relief techniques for childbirth using



Promoting a Natural Labour and Partner Involvement

This Booklet was first published in 1997 and then updated in 2003.

You can now find further updates, free point location videos and summary sheets
at <https://acupuncture.rhizome.net.nz/>

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Many thanks to those who gave their time and experience to make this pamphlet a reality.

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Introduction

My initial intention in showing these points to couples was to provide them with a useful tool for labour. It wasn't until using them myself, with the birth of our second child, that I fully understood the feedback I had been receiving. They weren't just "useful", they were essential! When my partner was not using the points the contractions definitely intensified! During the birth of our third child I was timing the contractions as lasting 15 seconds, while without the acupressure, they were lasting a full minute. This effect continued until shortly before transition.

As an acupuncturist, I was surprised to find such a powerful effect using acupressure. (There are studies demonstrating the effect of acupuncture during labour but none that I know of for acupressure).

In traditional Chinese medicine terms, I see them as prompting the body to work more efficiently. From a medical model, they can be viewed as, promoting the release of endorphins, blocking the pain receptors to the brain, dilating the cervix, and increasing the efficiency of the contractions.

What is important is that they are easy to use, can be used at the beginning of labour by the support people, and that there are consistent effects. From my own clinical follow up in the first two years of using these for 82 couples, the majority, 69 (83%), found them useful. Of those 59 (60%), described them as "excellent", "brilliant" and "amazing".

This booklet outlines eight points and details their use in a "hands on" approach. They are labelled as acupuncture points, the letters indicate the name of the meridian, and the number corresponds to the position on that meridian. Extra points have been labelled according to the body part.

In Traditional Chinese Medicine, meridians are a series of channels that carry qi (energy) through the body. These meridians are a separate system from nerves, blood vessels and lymphatic ducts. They contain over 600 points. It is through restoring and balancing the bodies energy that changes can be made to the way the body functions.

There are points labelled "not recommended for routine use in pregnancy". These are points that can be used to stimulate beneficial effects related to labour preparation while others can be used to induce labour. Due to these effects they should be used as recommended in the handouts on this website or as prescribed by your acupuncturist.

These points are easy to use, empower women during labour and encourage close support people involvement. It was my hope when originally publishing this booklet that they would become a routine part of antenatal education. It is gratifying that research (as referenced on this website), now demonstrates beneficial effects when used in this way.

Using Acupressure

These points are not to be used with gritted teeth! Prior to labour they may feel strange or uncomfortable while practicing the location, but they should feel useful to you when you are using them during labour. Setting up a pain relieving effect, a sense of well-being, or a feeling of control that wears off when your support people stop using the points. On using them correctly there should be a distinct feeling around or at the site of pressure. This may be felt as a numbness, warmth, tingling, aching or buzzing sensation. If they feel uncomfortable or painful try repositioning or select another point. These points are a selection of acupuncture points, different points will suit different people, and there are different points for the changing stages of labour.

Apart from the section labelled "When labour does not go as planned" there are no right times for using certain points. The right points to be using are those that you feel to be effective. It is important to try them all to find the points that best suit you.

These points appear to be of greater benefit if commenced at the onset of labour, rather than waiting till there is strong pain. From the feed back I receive it appears using them early is important. As women report not only a reduction in the level of their pain but also a sense of well being, (that they are coping well, feel calm and relaxed), that disappears when their support people discontinue the acupressure.

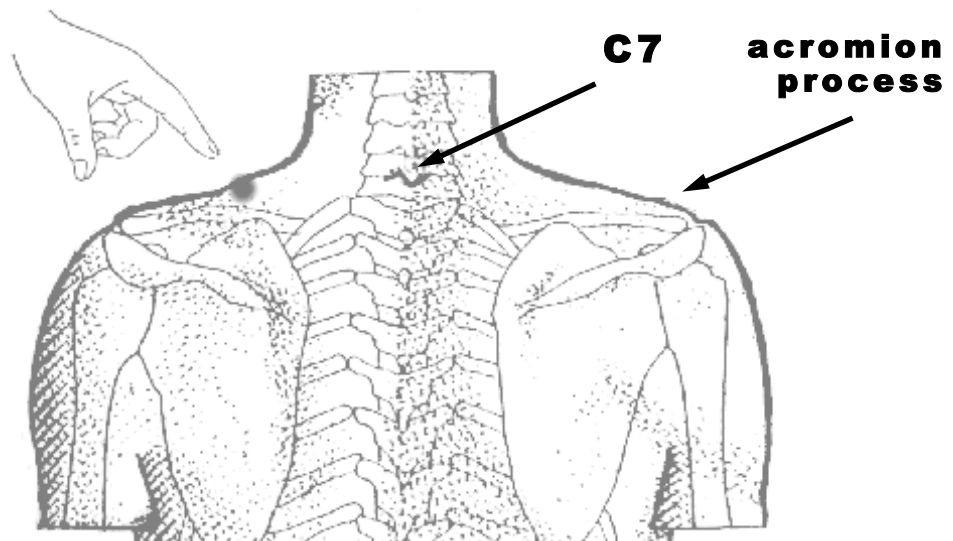
You can use any of these points at any time during labour. They are a tool that can be used in conjunction with any other therapies you would like to try. When using a Tens machine, I would recommend you try using the pressure points first, as people have commented that they prefer them, and they have the advantage of being portable - there is no reason why your support people can not be in contorted positions while you enjoy the benefits of a bath or the water pool!

My aim has been to provide an easy to understand layout for locating the points. For the majority of people these points will be simple to locate, however due to the diversity of the human body, and the changes that occur during pregnancy I strongly recommend that you check out the location with your midwife, doctor, acupuncturist, who will be able to show you in more detail if necessary.

As an acupuncturist, I cannot resist adding that there exists a wide range of treatments to aid and prepare a woman's body through pregnancy, labour, and post-nataly. I would recommended that you locate an acupuncturist that has compleated a course that involves a minimum of a three years training.

I welcome any feedback you may have, concerning the use of the points and the layout of this booklet.

GB 21



Point Location

When you draw an imaginary curved line between the bony prominence of the neck (C7), and the top of the shoulder joint (the Acromion Process) the point lies midway along this curved line, at the highest point of the shoulder muscle. It will feel tender with a numbing, buzzing or warming sensation (this sensation varies with individuals). The sensation is stronger on this point than any other points along this line. You can find this point on yourself by bringing your hand diagonally across your chest and palpating with your index finger along this “imaginary line”.

This point will always be on this line with “C7”. C7 is usually the first prominent bone you see on the back of the neck, when you tilt the face towards the ground. If there appear to be two prominent bones, place a finger on each bone and ask your partner to slowly turn their head from side to side. C7 will move slightly as the head is turned.

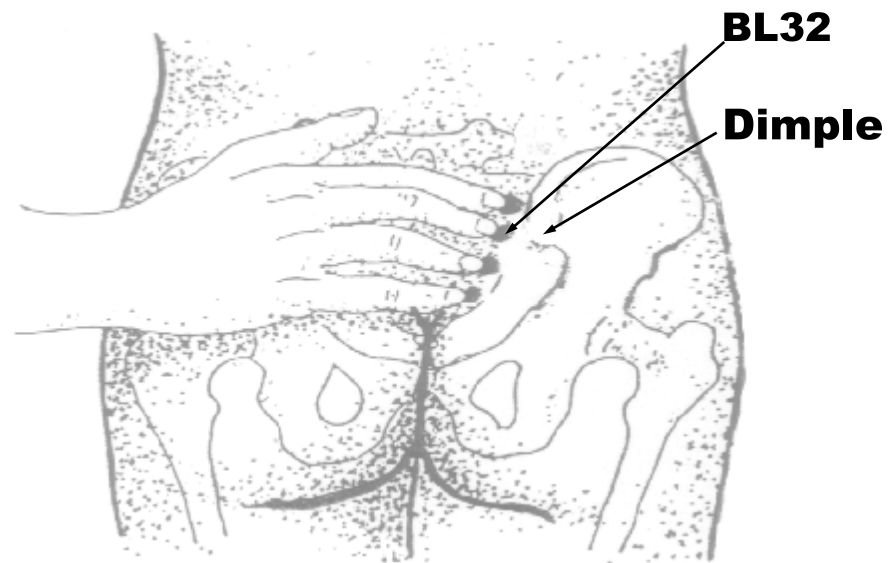
This point has a descending action to aid the first and second stages of labour, and can stimulate uterine contractions.

This point is not recommended for routine use during pregnancy

Acupressure Technique

- It is important not to just rub the skin over the area but to apply firm downwards pressure with your thumb, knuckle or elbow.
- When using your thumbs, the pressure needs to come from your arm rather than the thumb joint, otherwise the support person will end up with sore thumbs. Wooden spoon handle ends have also been used successfully on this point.
- These acupoints are usually used with the support person applying pressure on both shoulders together, but I know of woman who have successfully used this on themselves using only one shoulder at a time.
- The pressure can be applied at the beginning of each contraction or continual gentle pressure applied that is intensified during contractions.

BI 32



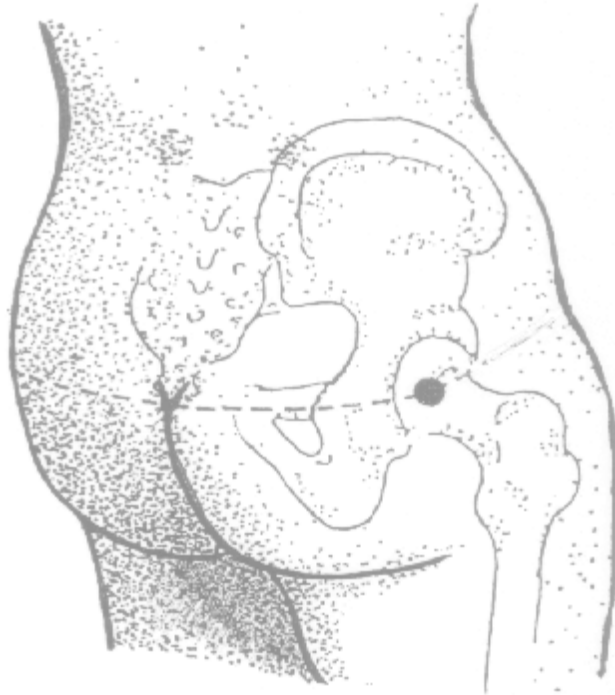
Point location

This point lies midway between the dimples above the buttocks and the spine. Note - BL 32 is not the dimple. If you cannot see the dimples clearly, it is approximately one of the woman's index finger lengths above the top of the buttock crease, one thumb width either side of the spine. When you place your finger on BL 32 you can feel the depression of the Sacral Foramen where the point lies. As labour begins start here and as labour progresses move down the spine (approximately one thumb width at a time, moving slightly closer to the spine until as you arrive at the top of the buttock crease). The timing of this movement downwards will depend on the woman who will usually instinctually tell the support person to move lower as labour progresses.

Acupressure Technique

- The support person places their knuckles into the points and applies firm pressure. This can be increased by the woman rocking backwards into the support person at the beginning of a contraction, obtaining maximum pressure.
- From feedback, these appear to be the most frequently used points. Producing a pleasant "anaesthetising" effect on the strength of the contractions, noticeably "wearing off" when pressure is stopped and building up again when recommenced.
- There is a distinct sensation produced when you are pressing into the Sacral Foramen. This may be felt as a numbness, warmth, tingling, aching or buzzing. If there is sharp pain, you are pressing on the surrounding bone.
- It is important to note that for some women the Sacral Foramen are not exactly in a straight line. Be guided by your partner's feedback.
- This is most frequently used with the woman leaning or kneeling against a wall, table, bed etc. It can also be effectively used in water, it just requires a little flexibility on behalf of the support people!

Buttock Point



Point Location

This point is in a direct horizontal line from the top of the buttock crease. If you press along this line there will be a tender point approximately two thirds of the distance between the buttock crease and the hip bone.

Acupressure Technique

- When you place your hands on the woman's hips you can push your thumbs into this point, helping the woman to move in rotating movements during contractions.
- This point can also be used during transition, especially when combined with massage strokes, beginning at BL 32 and radiating out to this point.

Labour Preparation

Two to three days prior to the due date, BL 32 and this buttock point can be used along with some sacral massage, utilising strong downwards strokes to and around the buttocks. The aim of this is to help free up the pelvic energy to encourage an optimal labour.

Hand Points



Point Location

These points lie along the creases of the hands where the fingers join the palm. These are said to help release endorphins (the body's natural painkillers) into the body.

These combs may be used applying pressure across the creases of the hands where the fingers join the palm, or where the fingers join the palm or across the middle of the palm—whatever is the most comfortable.

The idea of using these combs in this way came from reading about metal combs being used in Russia on women's feet while they were lying in bed during labour!

These are said to help release endorphins (the body's natural painkillers) into the body.

In Chinese medicine points of the hand and feet can act as 'mirror' points so it seemed logical to try to see if there were beneficial effects by using something more practical!

Acupressure Technique

- Hold a small comb so that the teeth are touching the points. You can then grip the comb during contractions, applying the pressure that you feel is useful.
- Some women find these points very helpful, to others they are merely a distraction.

K1



Point Location

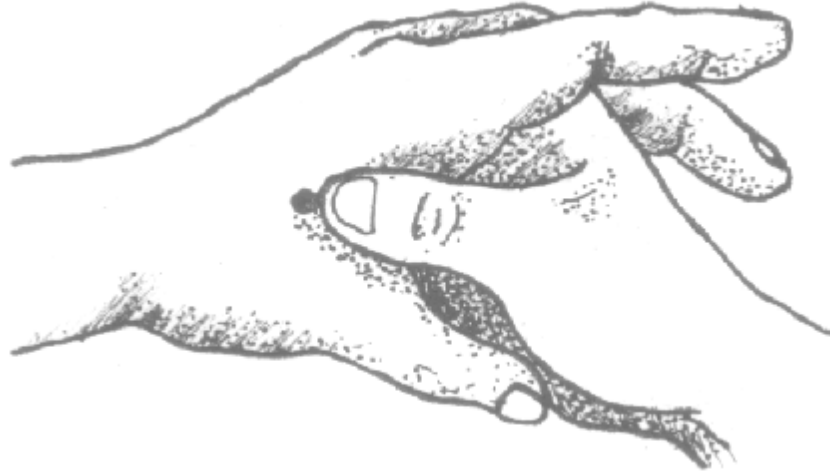
This point lies in depression found in the top one third of the sole of the foot , when the foot is in planterflexion (pulling the toes towards the sole of the foot).

Acupressure Technique

- Place strong pressure in this depression pushing inwards and upwards towards the big toe.
- This point has a useful relaxing effect and can be used at any time during labour. It has been noted as being especially useful effective during the second stage of labour. (It is easily accessed if the woman is positioned on her knees.)
- Also useful during labour where there are feelings of panic (for example, going into a labour with a unpleasant previous birth experience).
- A useful point to use to help the perineum relax during second stage.
- There is a tendency for the support people to stand back during the second stage. Please try these points, they can be very useful.

Co 4

Point Location



This point is found between the first and second metacarpal bones (thumb and first finger) at the distal end of the crease on both hands.

Acupressure Technique

- Simply apply pressure with the thumb as shown in the diagram.
- This has the effect of intensifying contractions, useful if contractions are of irregular intensity
- This point can be used during the second stage of labour. It aids the body's efforts to move the baby down through the birth canal, especially useful if the woman is tired and not pushing effectively.

This point is not recommended for routine use during pregnancy.

Sp 6

Point Location



This point is located using four of the woman's finger widths above the tip of the medial malleolus (the shin bone on the inside of the ankle). The point will be very tender and is found when you slide your finger off the edge of the tibia bone, towards the inside of the leg. It is useful on initially locating this point to press on the tibia, it produces a very different sensation from the point.

This is an important point to help the cervix dilate, and can be used when the cervix is not effectively dilating during labour.

Acupressure Technique

- Direct pressure is applied with the index finger or thumb.
- I recommend using this point on one leg at a time for approximately one minute, then using it on the opposite leg 20 - 30 minutes later.
- This point will be very tender and after using it some women will feel their cervix stretching and contractions strengthening.

This point is not recommended for routine use during pregnancy until cervical ripening is required .

Cervical Lip

This is when, although the woman wants to push, the cervix has not dilated enough. She will be told not to push by her Midwife or Doctor. If this becomes a problem during labour, apply strong pressure with your knuckles to Bl 32.

Waters Breaking

If your waters have broken and labour is not progressing, you can use Bl 32 and Sp 6 to help establish labour.

Inducing Labour

It is probably obvious that there are points included in this pamphlet that could be used to aid the induction of labour. I do not want to cover the specifics of these. If an induction is necessary I recommend an individual assessment by a qualified practitioner. If this is not possible I would be happy to discuss some points with your Midwife or Doctor.

Nausea and Vomiting

P6

Point Location

This point is three of the woman's finger widths above the transverse crease of the inner wrist. It lies directly between the two tendons felt here. (The tendons of palmaris longus and flexor carpi radialis.)

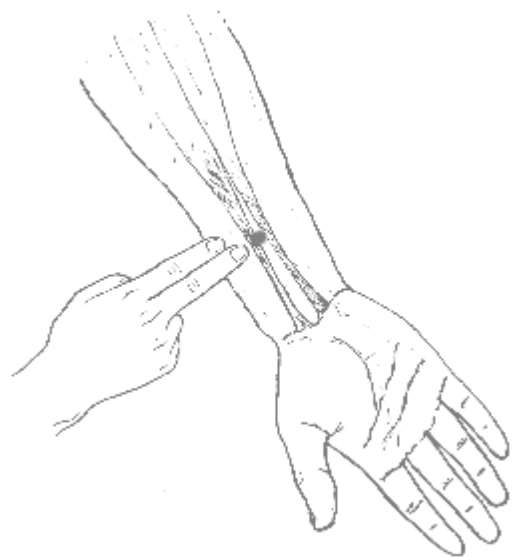
Acupressure Technique

This may be used for sensations ranging from mild feelings of nausea through to vomiting.

Place pressure on the point holding until effective, usually within five minutes. Pressure can be used on both wrists or only one, whatever is more practical.

It is possible to buy wrist bands that apply pressure to this point. These are available through chemists, sold as a remedy for motion sickness. In New Zealand they are termed "Sea Bands."

Alternately you can easily construct your own. Form a wrist band with Elastic, and sew onto it a rounded button. With the rounded edge pressing onto the skin. Take care that once in place, the pressure exerted on the skin is firm but not uncomfortable.



Comments

“I found using acupressure during labour brilliant. Having used acupressure I wouldn’t even consider being in labour without it. The difference was amazing - I felt a lot calmer and able to cope and much more relaxed. It was really good for me to have my partner so closely involved with each contraction - I felt connected and supported. Acupressure helped me stay focused and calm. Acupressure is safe, effective, natural and I was in control. An ideal pain management technique.”

Sarah Doherty, Wellington

“When I went into labour with my second child, I used the acupressure points thinking they would take the edge off the pain at least. It wasn’t until I had a contraction while my husband was loading the car that I realised just how effective they were! They halved the pain and allowed me to feel more in control of things. It was easy to learn them and meant my husband got to do something very useful during the birth. The labour felt much quicker since the contractions didn’t feel as bad as the first labour, right up to transition, which meant I only used the acupressure points and didn’t need any other pain relief.”

Cathryn Skumiewski, Wellington

“The simple technique of acupressure enabled me to get through a short sharp labour without artificial pain relief. It also helped my partner to play an active part in the birth of our son. I’ve been recommending it flat out since my most positive experience with it!”

Ruth Oliver, Wellington

“At first I was very cynical about acupressure’s ability to relieve the pain of childbirth, but as soon as my partner’s contractions began, it was obvious that this was really effective. She almost seemed to enjoy the contractions, as long as I was pressing very hard indeed on the right spots and not letting up for an instant. This was also the ideal way for me to feel fully involved in the birth and not get too panicky. We had a trouble-free, doctor-free labour and birth and we now have a beautiful, healthy, happy son. I’d recommend accupressure to anyone having a baby.”

Mark Derby, Wellington.

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Debra has a background in nursing, graduating from the London College of Acupuncture in 1989. With a practice based in women's health she developed a specific interest in treating pregnancy and began teaching acupressure and acupuncture to midwives in 1997. This led to the publication of articles on the use of acupressure and acupuncture in maternity care and her book "The Essential Guide to Acupuncture in Pregnancy & Childbirth" in 2006, with subsequent translations into German and French.

Debra completed her PhD on the use of acupuncture in threatened miscarriage in 2014 through the University of Western Sydney and then spent five years developing and delivering a masters programme through the New Zealand School Acupuncture and Traditional Chinese Medicine.

Additionally Debra spent 12 years as a clinical supervisor at a hospital maternity outpatients acupuncture clinic and in 2019 ran a multibed maternity clinic. Debra now offers e consults about the acupressure techniques in this book and acustimulations techniques developed from clinical practice or a range of for pregnancy, labour and postpartum care.

She continues to be involved in promoting the use of these in pregnancy through courses for midwives, an online mentoring programme for acupuncturists, as well as publishing and lecturing internationally on the use of acupressure and acupuncture in maternity care.

Debra and her Partner have three children. The youngest two were natural deliveries, using the techniques outlined in this booklet.