



Healthy  
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SUMMIT



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## Preparing For Childbirth

### SUMMARY KEYWORDS

birth, pelvic floor, baby, labor, deep squat, pelvic floor physical, women, body, hospital, squat, bit, childbirth, prepare, people, doula, therapist, weeks, c section, physical therapist, slow

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Welcome to our session on preparing for childbirth. I'm Professor James Adams and with me today is Dr. Ashley Zimmerman, who's a physical therapist who specializes in women's pelvic health. Welcome, Ashley.

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Hi. Thank you for having me.

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Ashley, can you tell us a little bit about your background and your experience in advising women about preparing for childbirth?

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Yeah, so I've been a physical therapist specializing in pelvic health, primarily women, for eight years now. And I'm also a full spectrum doula. So a doula is a birth support person full spectrum, meaning I am trained in the birth piece of it, as well as the postpartum piece of it.

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That's right. And that's just a wonderful experience. And to have that dual background, I think, can you tell women a little bit about your recommendations about preparing the pelvic floor for



labor and why do you think that's so important? You

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Yeah, so this is something that I talk about a lot with either my doula clients or just my pelvic health clients who I'm seeing prior to their birth, um, you know, our ancestors have given birth without all of the fancy interventions that we have now, right. And one of the reasons why there tends to be a little bit more difficulty maybe I'll say in the preparation for birth now is because we sit so much. So one of the ways our pelvic floor prepares for childbirth is being able to go into a deep squat. And when we sit and honestly, modern toilets kind of took away the need for us to be able to have that deep squat posture because as soon as toilets were raised to the height that they are today, then we cut we just lost. There's no part of our daily life that we have to find that deep of a squat. So over time we got used to not being in this deep squat. So our pelvic floors have a little bit more difficulty opening. But if you just squat, you can prepare your pelvic floor for birth that way. So what I recommend is this isn't to be done without holding on to something. So using even your kitchen sink, if you have a stair banister that you can hold on to that works as well, or even just an open door, you can hold on to both sides of the handles, but kitchen sink always works just as well. And the reason I want you to hold on to something is because you're gonna allow yourself to go deeper in the squat, and you don't have to worry so much about like controlling your form in the upper body. So you're slowly lowering down into your squat and then you're slowly standing back up, you're inhaling as you lower and you're exhaling as you stand up, the more you can get your pelvic floor use to opening in this way the more it's going to know what to do during birth because when you're in labor, that's not the time to teach the pelvic floor that it needs to open. Right? It needs to have practiced. And so the more you practice prior to giving birth, the more the pelvic floor knows what to do, when you're in the middle of it, and it doesn't have to be, you know, this big. Oh my gosh, let's teach it how to lengthen because the baby's trying to come out. And so if the baby is in a pelvis where the pelvic floor is lifting, instead of kind of think of it as like a slow lengthening. baby's gonna be, we're getting we're getting two different things going on, right, we're getting a lift and babies trying to come out. So we need that slow lengthening, which happens in a deep squat. You can start so many times the follow up question to that is okay, how many do I do? Um, so my recommendation is to do a few five to 10 More often throughout the day, then 100 in the morning and 100 at night, because if you did that, that's 200 squats, that's a lot of squats, but you've given your pelvic floor all day to get used to that resting or sitting position. So if you can constantly remind your pelvic floor that it needs to lengthen, that's what's gonna make the change in labor. One last piece on that because you're pregnant, and so you have good days and bad days, right? So some days, you might only get in 10 squats, that's okay. Some days you might have a really good day and you get in 100 you 10 times throughout the day, you did five to 10. That's a lot. So just take it day by day, but just know the more that you prepare your body like that, that's going to transfer over into the eastern labor.



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And so you mentioned that it's important to help with Eastern labor and might also help reduce terrorists that can occur during birth. Can you talk a little bit About that,

05:00

yeah. So um, when the pelvic floor is able to lengthen, obviously that just creates less tension through the tissue. And so again during labor is not the time to teach your pelvic floor how to open and needs to be taught along. The other thing that you can do for helping to reduce tears is massaging the vaginal opening after 36 weeks. So this is not to be done prior to 36 weeks, you can squat your entire pregnancy as long as it's feeling good in your body. But massaging the vaginal opening after 36 weeks and it's a massage, it's not deep tissue, you're not cranking on it trying to stretch it. Think of trying to allow and this can be done with your finger or your partner's finger. You're trying to allow the tissue to accept your finger into it or you're trying to get the tissue to melt around your finger. It's this isn't like you're stretching your hamstrings as hard as You can, it's just a gentle massage again to teach that tissue that it's okay to open, it's okay to soften and allow baby to pass through.

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Yeah, right. And in terms of a deep squat, you're talking about shifting your bottom all the way down to the, your heels basically as low as you can go.

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Yes, as low as you can go. And so as baby grows, this will probably change and it's okay as baby grows, that you widen your feet a little bit more. So you're going to be if you're going into a deep squat, you're gonna be naturally in a little bit wider of a stance, and that's perfect. You don't have to be you know, have your feet hip distance apart. But yeah, as baby grows, you're going to find that you can maybe go deeper or each day is going to be different too. So as deep as what's comfortable, you're not forcing it.

06:58

Okay, great and What about other things in order to prepare for birth? What other recommendations would you have for them for women to get ready for childbirth?

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So, one of the other things that I find to be super helpful for you and your partner is to come up with a birth plan. Now, if you're working with a doula, they probably have their own birth plan. But even if you're not working with a doula, whatever kind of birthing center you're going to be giving birth in, they will have a birth plan. And it can seem kind of like, Well, why do I have to fill out this paperwork, but it's important because just like the pelvic floor, we don't want to teach



the pelvic floor how to lengthen when you're in labor. You don't want to discuss these things. When you're in labor. You want to know what you and your partner's wishes are ahead of time. And if you are birthing at a center where there for whatever reason isn't a birth plan, you can google them and get a simple one. So you fill it out you and your birth partner You fill it out so that they know what your whoever your support person is going to be so that they know your wishes. And that then you guys can talk about it. And what I tell people is to come up both of you, whoever you are, or whoever your partner is for or your labor partner, and you you're going to come up with three of your biggest fears. Okay? Because what happens is we have this birth plan and then let's say okay, you weren't you didn't we use epidurals, right, because everybody usually knows what an epidural is. So an epidural. Some people want them some people don't and it's totally up to you, whichever you decide is great. But let's say you didn't want an epidural. And then something happens and you need an epidural. So your partner needs to know when you're really serious like okay, yes, it's okay that I have an epidural because all they've heard from you before is I don't want an epidural. I don't want an epidural. So now they're going to be confused, right and you don't want to pause while you're in labor to do discuss if you're if you're being serious or not, right? So you come up with these things like, Okay, this is what I wanted my birth on what happens if that doesn't go as planned? Where would we go next, right so that when you're in the situation, you've already talked about it, you're already prepared. You already know what the next plan is. And you can just move on to that next step without having to get really nervous. Because when you're going through labor, it can seem like there's a sense of urgency. So if the doctor the nurse comes in, and they say, Okay, this is going on, what would you like to do next? Sometimes it can be like, Oh my gosh, we have to decide right now. And if that happens, just take a deep breath. I mean, if there is an emergency, and they need to cut you off, they're not going to give you any time. For deep breathing. They're going to say this is life or death. We're going now, right? But there are choices in labor. And there's supposed to be choices in labor. And so if you can, if you Give yourself a second to breathe, and then connect with whoever your birth support person is because you'll have talked about all of this that can really help ease any of the tension and the worry during labor.

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Yeah, I think that makes very good sense to talk about it ahead of time to know what some of the questions are, that might come up to you, at least you're not caught off guard and can prepare as much as possible. Let's talk also about other preparations to do what are the some of the things that women should bring with them. So they have a bag packed and ready to go?

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Yeah, so first time moms, I'm one wanna usually have like the perfect outfit, and the perfect outfit for them. And I love that I get so excited because I love to look at the baby clothes. But



don't forget about yourself. So a couple things that I recommend people. People bring in, I'm gonna there's a Frieda baby is a brand and they have a Perry wash bottle that's meant to be used in a pair. So Perry area is just washing like the vaginal opening, the the anus, that area. So after childbirth, you're going to be sore. So using this bottle instead of having to use toilet paper is so helpful. And what it is, is it's a bottle with that you put just plain warm water in, and you use that to clean after toileting. Um, and the warm water is much more friendly than again, the hard toilet paper free to baby is the brand that's my favorite because they have one that's designed to be used upside down. So you can use it while you're sitting on the toilet. Um, ice packs disposable ice packs, you can get some that have like a really soft cloth covering for them. Because, again, even if you've had a C section, there's going to be some changes in the pelvic area and so an ice pack helps reduce the swelling, it helps initiate kind of the feel better mechanism. And if it's disposable, then you can just toss it, you know, especially when you're in the hospital. Um, you can sew pads. After having a baby vaginally, you're not allowed to use tampons for six to eight weeks. I usually recommend going a little bit longer than that, but you're going to be bleeding. And so using pads is something that's very useful and some women will decide that they want to use incontinence products like toys or depends, and that's totally fine that some people just like that because then they don't have to wear underwear over it, they can just pull it up and pull it down when they have to use the restroom. But what you can do again to help with the swelling in the soreness is you can take your pad, some of them and soak them in a sitz bath water so You can get Earth mama organics so free to baby Earth mama organics are two of my favorite brands. On Earth, Mama organics has a sitz bath that you can just order in the pack. It's all ready, you just mix in water and you can soak some of your pads in it and then put them in the freezer. So you can get then you take the pad out of the freezer and place it in your underwear, your whatever else if you're using the poser depends. And now you're getting the cooling effect and the healing effect from the sitz bath mix with the ice and it's not going to be too intense. It's not like you're putting an ice cube. Right? So that is super helpful. Something that most women don't think about. hemorrhoids are super common after pregnancy. And again, it's common, it's okay they'll go away. You can speak with your pelvic floor physical therapist if they continue. But witchhazel is another really good just thing that you can toss in your bag. To help with the discomfort If you experience any hemorrhoids, and you would just put it on a cotton swab and dab it on there, you can you could also put it in that Peri bottle, the frita, baby and use that if you need it. If it's bothering you to just put it on a cotton swab, too. So those are some of my favorite things. Besides, you know everything you need for baby. Don't forget to take care of yourself. Yeah.

14:27

Thanks. So it sounds like some very helpful and practical suggestions. Women be more comfortable. Mm hmm. So when we're getting close to the birth process, can you help? When



should a woman actually go to the hospital? What are some of the warning signs you should look for? What are some of the indicators

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so if you're whoever you're working, your medical professional and your doula you'll have discussed like when you're going to call your doula and when you're going to call the hospital so but as a general Rule. If your water breaks, let's say your water breaks at home. For infection purposes, you want to make sure that you're in the hospital for sure before 24 hours, but most people will recommend that you go in at 12 hours if nothing else has happened because sometimes the water breaks and then nothing happens. So if you're at that 12 hour mark, but if your water breaks, you're probably in contact with your doctor or the nurse and so they're going to be helping you along through this process. But as a general rule, you never want to be home after water breaking for more than 24 hours max. Okay, most people will go about the 12 hour mark. Once your contractions start, so when your contractions are first starting, you're going to be able to talk through them. And then as you as labor progresses, the contractions obviously get a little bit more intense. Once those contractions are about five minutes apart. They last a minute. And then that's been going on for about an hour. That's a really good indication that it would be time to go to the hospital because it's so what what happens if you go to the hospital too soon, is they're going to check you and they'll say, Great, you're doing awesome, but you can go back home. And because they because you can you, it's okay for you to be at home for that first part of labor. And so allowing yourself to labor at home a little bit, but then you got you just knowing when to go I would use the five minutes apart for one minute. And that has been going on for an hour. use that as kind of your guide. If you're working with a doula sometimes those numbers are a little bit different. But as a general rule, if you have nobody around, use that and be in contact with whoever your birth professional is if you have questions.

16:54

Yeah, thanks. That's very, very helpful, and I think will help women know when they're ready to head to the hospital. So many women are worried about the birth process itself and the pain and knowing not knowing what to expect. You talk a little bit about the birth process itself. What can women expect? What can they do during labor to help make it easier?

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Yeah. So I, so again, our ancestors, right, they have been, we've been giving birth for forever that the female body is designed to do this. In our modern day culture, we've kind of taken we've kind of put some of the fear into us, right? Because Because honestly, like our ancestors, they didn't have a choice, right? The baby was coming and they better figure out what they're gonna do about it. Right. And it became it was more ceremonious, right, it was more of a



beautiful process, and they were usually surrounded by more than just one person at their bedside. And so if you think of that, If you keep returning to your roots and what we were designed as humans to do, I think that in and of itself can put you at ease because it's not an unnatural process birth is not unnatural, it is completely natural. And so speaking off of that, when somebody says I want to have a natural birth, I challenge you to just think about that because birth is natural, it doesn't matter even if you've had a belly birth or a Syrian, it's natural. And so however the baby gets here is how the baby was supposed to get here, but try to kind of step back and say like, Okay, my body is meant to do this. And if you're taking the time to prepare your pelvic floor with the squatting and then the massaging around the vaginal opening, that helps you that helps remind your body of what it's meant to do. And if you can think of it more of it more of a softening, right your your pelvic outlet Where the baby is the vaginal canal where the baby is passing through if you can think of a softening sense around that, instead of a oh my gosh, this is gonna hurt Holy cow. I'm scared when we say things like that to ourselves, our body tenses, but if you can get into practice of, I'm going to soften through this area of my body. Again, it's going to know what to do before you get into labor. Breathing is something that you've probably taken or you are going to take some kind of childbirth prep class and so they talk about breath a lot. Breathing is the biggest tool that you can use during your contractions to help you and what you can think of your diaphragm sits inside of the ribcage and it attaches 360 degrees inside of the ribcage. And we think of it usually as it's just the muscle that we use to breathe with the diaphragm is a powerful stability muscle and it is like I said it's it's powerful and So you can think of breathing the baby down, you can use your diaphragm because when you breathe in your diaphragm has kind of this dome shape. When you breathe in, it flattens and widens. And it's flattening and widening over the top of where the baby is sitting. So you can literally think of breathing the baby down. Always, always, always return to your breath if you're feeling anxious. So in those couple days prior where you know, or the couple weeks prior, where you're getting a little, you're starting to pack your bag and you're starting to get really excited, but you're also a little nervous. Always return to your breath, because that's going to calm your nervous system and allow you to return to those the softening in the opening thoughts versus the tensing thoughts.

20:45

I think that's a great reassurance and great to remind women just trying to relax during this difficult time. And I think that will really help them. Thank you. Yeah, and then what about after birth? What are your recommendations on women after Labor? Both in the hospital when they get home to help fully and rapidly recover.

21:05

Yeah, so, um, we talked a little bit about some of the pain things you can do like I mentioned the



ice packs and to have those with you. Um, I recommend that everybody sees a pelvic floor physical therapist, this is done at the six to eight week mark because you wouldn't have you know, a major bicep or knee injury and not go seek some kind of help. So this, seeing a professional who specializes in this area of the body is so beneficial for helping you to return to your body's ideal function. Um, in Europe, especially France is kind of the gold standard. You don't leave the hospital or birthing center without either seeing a pelvic floor physical therapist already in the hospital, or going home with your script to go see them. And so, unfortunately, sometimes we have to ask for those things here. It's getting better. It's becoming more common and more well known. But don't be afraid to ask, don't be afraid to say, hey, I'd love to go see a public for physical therapists. Can you write me a script for that because then you have it. And you're good to go. But you you won't see them for six to eight weeks post. For the first two weeks, my recommendation first two weeks after baby after your home, my recommendation is that you as mom are doing as little movement as possible. And so there are things throughout your day that you have to do. You have to get up to go to the bathroom you have if you have other kids, you have to get up to help them. And that but as much as you can, you're thinking of I'm just supposed to be laying in bed, because your body really needs those first two weeks to initiate the healing process. And if we try to rush through that, that's where some things can go wrong. Now, there are circumstances that don't always allow But as long as you're thinking, Okay, if I have a second, I'm going to go lay down and rest because I know that that's what's best for my body. Trying to give yourself nourishing foods will also help within this initial period. So thinking, of course, have your have your snacks and dogs, but make sure that you're nourishing yourself with really good nutrition that's going to help support the recovery process. And then slow is fast is what I tell people, if you try our culture tells us that we should bounce back from having a baby that we're supposed to look like we've never had a baby. And that is one of the quickest ways to get me upset. But throughout your postpartum journey, it's supposed to be slow and gradual. And in fact, the faster you try to go and the harder you try to push yourself That's probably ultimately going to make your recovery last even longer because your body isn't ready for it, we need to spend a little bit more time honoring what your body just did. And that comes from that starts with us. Right? And if we are honoring ourselves, the people around us are going to honor us too. So don't try to rush. This is a slow process. And it's okay for it to be slow. We've got to kind of start to learn. I think that the pandemic has maybe helped us learn that there can be some, there can be some joy and calmness, right? When we're forced to not have anything to do we find things to do, right. And so we're forced to have that slow down. So let yourself slow down. After you have the baby. Do what you have to do. There are things that you can't get through the day without doing but otherwise your job is to rest.

24:52

Okay, and when women come to see you, six to eight weeks after birth for pelvic session. Can



you talk a little bit about what are some of the things you might go over with them? Some of the things you might discuss, what would they expect?

25:08

Yeah, so the first piece of it is we always discuss. I always go back to adolescence. And because I want to know the whole story, I want to know what your body was doing prior to pregnancy and birth. Because it tells me a whole lot, but specifically related to the birth process, we go over your birth story. And so for many women, this is the first time that they've had a chance to tell their birth story, which is super powerful for them. And we need to share our birth story as part of just like validation to ourselves of what we just did. And we created this beautiful human, but also to help with the recovery process. So we go over the birth story, and we take sometimes a half hour to discuss that. And then after that, then I'll do a general Just a general posture scan. And then we go into more of the function of what the deep lower core is doing. So I reintroduce them to breath patterns because your breath pattern when you're pregnant is different because baby is growing. And so it's changing kind of the way you breathe. So we returned to the breath pattern, and we returned to how do we identify where the support muscles are in our body. If we deem it necessary to do an internal examination, we'll do that in the initial evaluation to sometimes we don't sometimes we wait till the second or third visit. Sometimes we do it on the first visit. And what that is, is it's it's not like going to the gynecologist where your feet are up in the stirrups, um, it's one gloved finger digital exam to see what's happening in the pelvic floor. There's no you're not we're not checking the cervix or anything like that. So it's literally just one finger so that I can evaluate what is the pelvic floor What does it feel like? Because one side often has more tension, one side maybe is a little bit more placid or it's not, when I asked you to contract, maybe one side isn't coming to the table as much as the other side. Sometimes that happens because the baby's head was more to that side. But we go through all of that. And then if you've had stitches, we look and we make sure that everything is fine, you'll have had that checked by your physician, but we always just check and make sure there's no signs of infection that were missed, or new signs of infection that weren't there when you saw your doctor. And then you know, you know what's going on. Right, you know, what's going on in your body. And so it's a way to just kind of get to know yourself. And then if you've had a C section, then we go over scar mobility and what we talk in depth about what the C section was and what layers they had to open in order to get the baby out. That type stuff and then from there, then you'll go through with your practitioner, then you'll go through what is the best plan for you. So postpartum recovery looks different for everyone. Um, sometimes I see people every week, sometimes I see people every other week, sometimes I see people once a month. So it just really depends on what you need to and what your body needs. Yeah, and you'll discuss all of that with your practitioner. One thing I will say is, um, pelvic floor physical therapist because it is a pretty intimate setting, and you talk about some intimate things. It's kind



of like going to a therapist or psychiatrist if you don't like them. And it's not necessarily that you don't like them as a person, right? If you're not getting a good vibe from them, and if you guys aren't meshing, it's okay to find another one. Because you want to feel super comfortable in this space because it's, you're in a vulnerable position. So it's okay to switch to a different person if you're not feeling it.

28:58

Sure. Yeah, well I think you made a great analogy that if you've had knee surgery, you're going to see a physical therapist after that, I think after a C section or after birth, make sense to go ahead and go for an initial consult and go from there. So thanks for sharing all that information. Yeah, absolutely. So overall, I think it's just so important to for women to realize that can help prepare for birth through squatting to make the birth process easier to reduce the risk of tears, which I think you mentioned are becoming more common nowadays, because women are not getting that same amount of exercise. Mm hmm.

29:34

Yeah. And it used to not be you know, we now we've used squats as exercise where before, it was just part of our life. We didn't have to add it in. And so that's what we were trying. That's what we're trying to return to is the natural movements that our bodies were meant to do instead of thinking of it as exercise. Yeah.

29:56

Thanks so much for all your great information on women prepare for childbirth and to recover afterwards. Yeah, thank you very much.

30:04

Yeah.

