



# Breathing Enhancement Additional Guidance

an online resource

created to accompany

## *Pre- and Perinatal Massage Therapy:*

*A Comprehensive Guide to Prenatal, Labor  
and Postpartum Practice  
(Third Edition)*

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**Chapter 4, page 123**





## Breathing Enhancement Additional Guidance

After observing your client's breathing patterns, restrictions and potentials, you may determine that different instructions from those in the book's technique manual are needed. Try out these additional strategies to enhance your clients' breath. They may be performed with the client in any table position, while seated on a chair or while standing.

### Glass Image

Offer your client the following visualization:

1. "Image your torso as a glass, with the bottom of the glass at your pelvis and the top of the glass at your upper ribcage. Imagine that your breath is like water."
2. "As you gently inhale through your nose without straining, watch in your mind's eye imagining that you fill your glass with water from the bottom to the top."
3. "As you exhale gently and completely through your mouth, imagine emptying your glass from the top to the bottom."
4. "Continue to watch the filling and emptying of your glass as you continue to breathe fully for several minutes or for as long as is desired."

### Wave Image (particularly helpful in re-educating from paradoxical breathing)

1. Ask your client to place one hand on her lower abdomen and the other on the center of her chest.
2. Instruct her to inhale through her nose and exhale through her



mouth gently and deeply without strain.

3. Offer your client the following visualization:
  1. “Imagine your torso as a sandy beach at your chest and a gently moving sea at your lower abdomen. Imagine that your breath is waves of that sea.”
  2. “Imagine that your hands are driftwood rising and falling with the water’s peaceful movements.”
  3. “With your gentle inhale, watch in your mind’s eye as your hands rise like driftwood with a gentle wave touching the shore. With that image guiding your breath, allow your abdomen to rise first and swell more extensively than your chest.”
  4. “As you exhale gently and completely, feel your hands sink on your torso when you exhale, first the hand on your chest and then the one on your belly, as you imagine the wave retreating.”
  5. “Continue watching the rising and falling of the driftwood on the gently surging and retreating water as you continue to breathe fully, without strain, for several minutes or for as long as is desired.”

### **For Increasing Posterior Breathing**

Offer your client the following visualization:

1. “Imagine that your spine is an elevator track with an elevator parked just below the level of your shoulder blades. The elevator is your breath, particularly your diaphragm moving as you breathe.”
2. “As you inhale gently, imagine your breath elevator descend to the level of your pelvis.”
3. “As you exhale gently and completely, see the elevator ascend



back to its starting point at your shoulder blades.”

4. “Continue to watch the elevator’s movement as you continue breathing fully, without strain, for several minutes or for as long as is desired.”

### Hints

- Observe any straining, especially any over inflating of the chest or activation of the scalenes and other neck muscles with the inhalations. Verbally encourage her to breathe effortlessly, without force.
- Note which muscles and fascial areas seem to be restricting her breath. Include specific techniques in your session to mobilize and reduce tension and holding in those places.
- Enhance her awareness by placing your hands at the specific areas of her torso toward which you are guiding her breath.
- When a client has difficulty with visualizations, switch instead to simplified instructions that are more kinesthetically than visually oriented. Ask her to place her hands on her abdomen at umbilicus level. Ask her to lift her hands away from her spine with her gentle inhale and allow them to sink toward her spine with her gentle and complete exhale.
- Encourage frequent, daily diaphragmatic breathing with various images to enhance her relaxation and to help her prepare for labor.

### A Brief List of Sources for Breathing Re-education and Imagery

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