

Hey Mama,

I'd like to check in with you about your upcoming birth. Let's flip the script this week, and start by getting out your Keep Journal, and digging in to how you are thinking and feeling, before hearing from me.

- How are my prenatal appointments going?
- How am I feeling about the birth?
- How am I feeling about my birth team?
- What are some of my **specific fears or concerns**?
(What are my providers monitoring or checking at upcoming appointments? Are there tests or markers I'm thinking about? How is baby's position?)
- What are my **vague or undefined worries**?
Can I slow down and notice any subtle tension, unease, or deeper apprehensions?
(It's okay to name them — writing them down won't make them happen. It simply brings them into the light.)
- Are there any **concrete actions** I can take to support myself?
(Appointments to schedule, movement or practices to try, supplements, or questions to ask?)
- After naming what's within my control, can I gently release the rest?
What's outside of my hands?
(Acknowledging what I can't control helps me know where to let go.)

Reflection:

- Am I feeling generally **surrendered** about my birth?
- How closely does my current mindset align with these words?

"If I can control it, do something about it. If I can't control it, release."

"Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference." – Serenity Prayer

>>>> Check in with yourself right now after journaling by closing your eyes for a moment and feeling your physical body and emotions that give you clues towards your nervous system state. If the above journaling was at all activating for you, consider standing up, shaking it out, and doing your nervous system protocol to initiate the calming and centering process.

>>>> Please know that **wherever you are at, and however you feel about your impending birth is just as it should be.** Nervousness, excitement, confidence, terror, detachment, numbness.... These emotions are all natural and normal. You don't need to talk yourself out of them or try to change them in any way. Give yourself grace that you are doing this human thing the best you can, just like all the other billions of humans.

"I think SO MUCH emphasis exists on the birth process itself, which is ultimately out of your control in many ways - and think more time put into caretaking and providing for relationship impact before and after, and thinking through our family values for the new chapter we were entering. So less focus on the birth, more focus on relationships and values after the baby arrives." ~Anonymous Mama on what she would do differently during pregnancy.

Whether you have conscious anxiety about the birth or not, I encourage you to use that energy to prepare for the birth in two ways: 1. The Practice, and 2. The Practical.

Practice refers to all of the intentional mind/body preparation work we've been doing, from relaxation to practicing labor breathing. I can't recommend stretching and gentle movement enough i.e. [Spinning Babies](#). If you haven't started yet, it's not too late. And if you don't enjoy getting on a mat, maybe that's even more reason to do it. Easing into discomfort and even something that is counter to your preferences is great training for distress tolerance—it helps you grow. Intentionally dedicating just 5 minutes a day in this way is a simple action you can take that can be both beneficial for your baby's birth position and calming for your nervous system.

Practical preparations are a natural response to the last weeks of pregnancy, and a necessity. Channel your energy of uncertainty into productive nesting activities, turning your nervousness into something tangible. Your efforts -- to finish those house projects before the baby comes, pack your hospital bag, get your work responsibilities situated, stock your freezer with healthy ready to eat foods, and figure out logistics with your partner -- will bring satisfaction and peace at the end of the day.

>>>> I have included a Basic Hospital Bag Packing Checklist at the bottom of this letter.

Here's another way to practice breathing, both for labor and for everyday mindfulness.

Mantra

Wikipedia says “Mantra is a Sanskrit word: a sacred utterance, a numinous sound, a syllable, word or phonemes, or group of words in Sanskrit, Pali and other languages believed by practitioners to have religious, magical or spiritual powers. Some mantras have a syntactic structure and literal meaning, while others do not.” Used in hinduism, buddhism, taoism, sikhism, sufism, as well as Judeo-christian traditions also use repetitive prayers to the same effect. “Mantra” definitely has an exotic, intimidating, or religious insinuation to it. I’m not going to teach you any sanskrit mantras, or any hand positions. There are resources if you feel drawn to that kind of thing! You don’t have to be any kind of religion or buy into any set of beliefs or memorize anything to use a mantra. In fact, we’ve all probably spontaneously used mantras at various times in our lives.

At its most basic level, a mantra is a sound or word repeated over and over while in a meditative state or to produce a focused and relaxed state. When you repeat a number over and over to yourself so you don’t forget, that’s a mantra of sorts. In sports or other performance, if you ever repeated anything to yourself like “I can do this. I can do this.” or “watch the ball. Watch the ball. Watch the ball.”, that was a mantra. Many simple songs and rhymes that we play with infants and toddlers are mantra-esque, creating repetitive, soothing sounds usually with nonsensical meaning. Any repeated chant has been shown to be calming to the nervous system.

Herbert Benson, a pioneer in stress and relaxation research, found that using “inner value” language [can ease both physical and emotional stress and induce the relaxation response](#). He was among the first Western researchers to show that repeating a simple, calming word like “peace” or “love” could create measurable health benefits in both the brain and body. He found that sitting in a comfortable posture, in a quiet environment, with an object of focus that you continuously return to induces the relaxation response. The relaxation response is an intentional slowing of brain activity, triggering a full-body slowdown and a sense of well-being. This state has measurable benefits including lowered blood pressure, slower breathing rate, improved digestion & emotional wellbeing. Dr. Benson emphasized that it does not matter so much what the object of focus is; the important thing is how you use this object. All you need to do is bring the mind back to this object each time the mind “wanders off” in thought.

“We can’t change the stressors in our lives, but doing this [relaxation response meditation] for 10 to 20 minutes every day will change our reactions to them.”

~Dr. Benson, researcher, author, teacher, father

Using a mantra with your breath is impactful because it combines the calming and centering benefits of focused breath awareness along with an affirmation or intention of a meaningful concept. Not only that, but the rhythm of your breath provides a tempo and structure for the words, and vice versa, which our mind can easily hold and stay focused on.

Ways that I use mantra with the breath:

* **Yoga** - Mantra is complementary to meditation and yoga. I often use mantras with the breath during yoga, as taught to me by teacher Max Strom.

- Breathing in - *(something to bring in)*. Breathing out - *I let go of ... (something to release)*.
- Breathe in - *Compassion*; Breathe out - *I let go of guilt*.
- Breathe in - *Strength*; Breathe out - *I let go of worry*.
- Breathe in - *Peace*; Breathe out - *I let go of tension*.

* **Calm myself** in times of stress-

- Breathing in - *I am*; Breathing out - *Here. I am here*.
- Breathing in - *I accept*; Breathing out - *life as it is*.

* **Fall asleep** in times of insomnia or bad dreams-

- Breathing in - *Peace*; Breathing out - *Peace, Healing, Sleep*.
- Breathing in - *Receive*; Breathing out - *Let go*.

* **Gratitude** for recognizing and letting in the good-

- Breathing in - *Thank you*; Breathing out - *Thank you. Thank you.*

It can be kind of fun to make up your own that feels soothing and flows with your breathing rhythm!

Choosing a longer phrase or repetition of a word on the out breath to time it rhythmically so that the outbreath is slightly longer than the inbreath will give you that extended exhalation that favors the parasympathetic, meaning calming to the nervous system.

Mantra is similar to the zen meditation style of counting the breath with full attention on the breath, with the added layer of verbal meaning. Sometimes numbers or sanskrit words are actually preferable, BECAUSE of their lack of meaning, to let go of words altogether. But sometimes words are helpful for calling up a desired emotion or reminder. Try for yourself and see how it feels for you!

>>>> And remember - the mind will wander. That's what it does. When following the breath or any awareness practice that requires your attention, **the point is to return**, to start over at practicing where you put your attention, over and over and over.

Writing & Practice

- My pregnancy intention at the moment is:
- Are there simple words in this pregnancy intention that I can breathe into during my day NOW?

Practice Part One - The Practical

Take care of the practical realities of welcoming a new baby. Channel your energy into:

- Nesting (preparing the nursery or other areas in your home, organizing, finishing house projects before the baby comes)
- Pack your hospital bag (Basic Checklist below)
- Get your work responsibilities situated
- Stock your freezer with healthy ready to eat foods
- Have preparatory conversations and figure out logistics with your partner
- Find friends who have hand-me-down baby necessities like clothes, toys, swings, bassinets, etc.

Practice Part Two - Mind/Body Practice

- 1. Try out a mantra with your breath in your regular life, examples above.**
- 2. Try out a Guided Meditation - Full Labor Breathing with Visualization & Mantra**

Some people think more in words, others in images, but we all use both. Because of this variability, I am also offering a visualization as an object of focus. In [this recording](#), I will guide you through the previously shared labor breathing techniques, including relaxation breathing between contractions and slow, deep breathing during contractions, while inviting you to use a simple mantra: “open, allow.”

The guided breathing will alternate between using sleep-breathing for full relaxation and slow-breathing for contraction management. The recording will flow into a visualization with the breath for opening: blooming like a flower. It is often taught in various birthing classes to visualize the cervix softening and opening like a flower. Because you are still pregnant, and do not want the cervix to open just yet!!, we will practice this visualization with the heart. (Not that you would be likely to MAKE it happen by visualizing, but just for the sake of reserving that for

the real deal). The heart is an energy center in the physical body that has its own neurons and receptors, both [receiving and sending information to the brain](#). Heart opening can feel expansive emotionally, or it can be a little hairy if you are not used to feeling into your heart; much of our emotional experience can be stored in the heart area, and you may come across feelings that are old wounds. These can be tender and used to be protected/ covered up. So be gentle with yourself. Be curious. Allow sensations to be there, and be with them as a conscious observer. And use any discomfort or sensation in the heart area as practice material for labor. Surely, if you are built to feel intense labor contractions, you can feel an energy or emotion!

When you are in labor, or at any other time, **use words that resonate with you and feel right in the moment.**

The idea is to use words that are meaningful to YOU (perhaps your already crafted intention?) and integrate them into your breathing in a way that feels natural. This practice helps bring the sensation of your intention to life in the present moment. Visualization and mantra can be combined or practiced separately—trust your intuition in choosing what feels right. And remember, even if you forget or set aside all techniques in labor, your body knows what to do. Your role is to feel, relax, and allow the process to unfold, with appropriate medical guidance and social support by your side.

Be well, and be you!

Anna

[Link to my recording of Heart Opening Labor Practice \(with Visualization & Mantra\)](#)

Resources:

Harvard Health Blog: [Meditation for relaxation response](#)

University of Wisconsin Integrative Health: [Mantram Meditation](#)

[Guided Meditation To Support A Healthy Pregnancy & Successful Childbirth](#)

[Kundalini Yoga Book: Bountiful, Beautiful, Blissful: Experience the Natural Power of Pregnancy and Birth with Kundalini Yoga and Meditation](#)

Basic Hospital Bag Checklist

For Me

- Clothing:** Comfortable sweatpants, pajamas or a robe, socks, and a going-home outfit (loose stretchy pants).
- Nursing bras or tops:** If planning to breastfeed. Big loose tshirts or maternity shirts.
- Underwear:** Preferably high-waisted and comfortable.
- Toiletries:** Toothbrush, toothpaste, face wipes, moisturizer, deodorant, lip balm, hair ties.
- Slippers or flip-flops:** For walking around the hospital room.
- Phone and charger:** For me and partner. To stay connected and take photos.
- Snacks:** Easy-to-eat snacks for energy during and after labor. Think high nutrient, protein rich such as fruit, nuts, jerky/meat sticks, yogurt/smoothies.
- Meds & Supplements:** that you need to take daily.
- Electrolyte Hydration packets**
- Important documents:** ID, insurance card, and any hospital paperwork.

For Baby

- Onesies or outfits:** Bring a couple of sizes just in case (newborn and 0-3 months).
- Diapers and wipes:** Hospitals usually provide these, but a few extra won't hurt.
- Going-home outfit:** Weather-appropriate clothing for the trip home.
- Blanket:** For warmth and comfort tucked over the car seat or when carrying the baby outside.
- Make sure car seat is in the car and appropriately installed**

Optional:

- Playlist:** It can be nice to make a few hour long playlist of songs that feel soothing and appropriate to play throughout labor. You may or may not end up liking the sound of the music being on when you're actually in labor, but it's a fun labor project anyway.
- Creature comforts:** You will need to *try* to rest and sleep after the baby is born in between checkups and feedings. Anything that gives you a sense of comfort and increase your chances of sleep could be packed: eye mask, lavender essential oil, white noise machine, soft blanket, your favorite pillow...
- Tokens or talismans:** your lucky rock, that meaningful quote you painted on a card, the necklace from your grandmother, religious icons...Anything that helps you feel connected to your tribe and ancestors in a supportive way, or symbolizes strength, protection, or a quality you want to carry in with you to the experience of crossing the threshold into motherhood.