

# Acupressure

## for Pregnancy & Labour

*A handout from Sprout Natural Health*

Simple, safe points you and your partner can use through pregnancy, in the lead-up to birth, and during labour itself.

## Start here

A short collection of the acupressure points we teach our pregnant clients. Acupressure uses the same points as acupuncture, with steady thumb pressure instead of needles. You don't need to understand the theory to use the points.

It's split into four sections, so you always know what's safe for where you are right now. Each section lists every point you need for that stage, so you can just turn to where you're up to. It sits alongside your midwife and OB care, never instead of it, and there's a one-page cheat sheet that maps every point at a glance if you'd like one for your phone.

- **A. Everyday comfort.** Safe at any stage. Nausea, sleep, anxiety, a tired achy back.
- **B. Preparing for birth.** Gentle, daily, from 37 weeks. To ready your body, not to start labour.
- **C. Encouraging labour from home.** Full term only, and only with your midwife or OB's say-so.
- **D. During labour.** What your partner can do with their hands to help you through contractions.

## Safety, please read

- Don't use **SP6, LI4, BL32 or GB21** before 37 weeks. These can stimulate contractions or have a strong downward action, and we don't want that before you're full term. (**BL60** is a strong labour point too, but one we only use in clinic, not at home.)
- **Section C is full term only**, and only once your midwife or obstetrician has said it's OK for you. We don't use these points to start labour early for non-medical reasons. Due dates aren't an exact science.
- Stop straight away for sharp pain, dizziness, bleeding, your waters breaking, contractions that build when you're not in labour, or reduced movement from baby, and call your team.
- This handout doesn't replace a consult. If your pregnancy is complicated or you're not sure what's safe for you, come and see us or your midwife first.

**Using this at home.** Everything here is general education, not medical advice, and it doesn't replace your midwife, obstetrician or GP. Please use the points at your own discretion and check with your maternity team if you're ever unsure. Using them at home is your choice, so we can't be responsible for how they're used outside the clinic. We've written it carefully because we want it to be useful and safe.

**Safe** throughout pregnancy.

## A. Everyday comfort

*Safe at any stage of pregnancy. Use them as often as you want.*

The points in this section are safe to use any time you're pregnant: nausea, sleep, anxiety and general back ache. None of them stimulate labour. None have a 37-week rule.

### PC6 — Neiguan

*Pericardium 6*



**Find it.** Inside the forearm, three fingerwidths below the wrist crease, between the two tendons.

**Use it.** Any nausea, any trimester. Firm thumb pressure to a dull ache, 30 to 60 seconds, then swap arms. Sea-Band wristbands sit on the same point for all-day relief.

**Safe** throughout pregnancy.

### BL23 — Shenshu

*Bladder 23*



**Find it.** Low back, two fingerwidths either side of the spine, level with the bottom of the ribs. Two points, easier for a partner to find.

**Use it.** Low back ache and end-of-day tiredness. Firm thumb or knuckle pressure on both sides, one to two minutes. A warm pack here is lovely too.

## Yintang — between the eyebrows



**Find it.** Dead centre between the eyebrows, just above the bridge of the nose.

**Use it.** Anxiety, overthinking, tension headaches. Middle finger, gentle slow circles, one to two minutes, eyes closed. Lovely if a partner does it.

**Safe** throughout pregnancy and labour.

## HT7 — Shenmen

*Heart 7*



**Find it.** On the wrist crease, in line with the little finger, in the small hollow there.

**Use it.** Racing thoughts, trouble sleeping, late-pregnancy anxiety. Light pressure, one to two minutes, both wrists. Good in bed before sleep.

**Safe** throughout pregnancy and labour.

## B. Preparing for birth

*Gentle, daily, from 37 weeks. To soften and ready your body, not to start labour.*

From about 37 weeks there's a gentle bit of preparation you can do at home, the at-home version of the pre-birth acupuncture we do in clinic, drawn from Debra Betts' pre-birth protocol. Used daily, ST-36 and SP6 are thought to help soften the cervix and build a bit of calm and stamina for the day. We add GB34 for the tight hips and lower back of the last few weeks. Consistency from 36 weeks beats last-minute.

### ST-36 — Zusanli

*Stomach 36*



**Find it.** Four fingerwidths below the kneecap, one finger-width out from the shinbone, in the muscle just off the bone.

**Use it.** Daily from 37 weeks for stamina and energy. Firm pressure, one to two minutes each leg, twice a day. It's safe and nourishing at any stage too.

**Safe** throughout pregnancy.

## SP6 — Sanyinjiao

*Spleen 6*



**Find it.** Inside of the lower leg, four fingerwidths above the tip of the inner ankle bone, against the back edge of the shin. Often tender in late pregnancy, a good sign you're on it.

**Use it.** From 37 weeks, gently, to soften the cervix. Firm pressure toward the bone, hold a minute, release, repeat a few times each leg. Twice a day is plenty.

**Not before 37 weeks.** SP6 is one of the strongest labour points. Tell us or your midwife first if you've had a fast or early labour before.

## GB34 — Yanglingquan

*Gallbladder 34*



**Find it.** Outside of the lower leg, in the tender dip about a thumb-width below and in front of the bony bump under the knee.

**Use it.** From 37 weeks, for the tight, achy hips, thighs and lower back that build as baby gets heavier. Comfortable thumb pressure, a slow minute each leg.

**Safe** with comfortable pressure. A muscle-and-tendon point, not a labour point.

## C. Encouraging labour from home

*Full term only, and only after your midwife or OB has said it's OK.*

### Read this first.

- Only use these steps **once you're full term and your midwife or OB has given the ok**. If they haven't, this section isn't for you yet.
- **Stop and call your team** for contractions that build and don't settle, any bleeding, your waters breaking, or a change in baby's movements.

LI4 and SP6 are the classic pairing, worked together and repeated roughly hourly through the day. BL32 adds firm sacral pressure, and GB21 is used to help baby drop. It's a gentle, low-risk thing to do with your hands while your body keeps its own timing.

### LI4 — Hegu

*Large Intestine 4*



**Find it.** Back of the hand, on the mound of muscle in the webbing between thumb and index finger.

**Use it.** Full term only. Firm pressure to a clear ache, one to two minutes, swap hands, repeat roughly hourly through the day, paired with SP6.

**Not before 37 weeks.** It stimulates contractions.

## SP6 — Sanyinjiao

*Spleen 6*



**Find it.** Inside of the lower leg, four fingerwidths above the tip of the inner ankle bone, against the back edge of the shin.

**Use it.** Full term only. The classic partner to LI4. Firm pressure one to two minutes each leg, worked together with LI4 and repeated roughly hourly.

**Not before 37 weeks.** Tell us or your midwife first if you've had a fast or early labour before.

## BL32 — Ciliao

*Bladder 32*

**Find it.** On the sacrum, the second of the small dimples above the buttocks. Two points, one each side.

**Use it.** Full term only. A partner presses both firmly in toward the bone, holds about a minute, releases, repeats.

**Not before 37 weeks.** Strong sacral point with a downward action.

## GB21 — Jianjing

Gallbladder 21



**Find it.** Top of the shoulder, the tender spot halfway between the base of the neck and the bony tip of the shoulder.

**Use it.** Full term only. Firm downward pressure a minute or two each side. Its downward action is traditionally used to encourage baby to settle into the pelvis. It's not a substitute for any positioning advice from your midwife.

**Not before 37 weeks.** Strong descending action.

## D. During labour

*Partner's hands. Pressure ON with the contraction, OFF between.*

In active labour your job is to labour, and your partner's is to be useful with their hands. Press as the contraction builds, hold through the peak, ease right off in the rest between. Let her tell you if she wants more or less.

### BL32 — Ciliao

*Bladder 32*



**Find it.** On the sacrum, the second of the small dimples above the buttocks. Two points, one each side.

**Use it.** The partner's number-one tool. Press both dimples firmly in toward the bone through each contraction, release between. Leaning forward over a bed or ball makes it easier to reach.

**Not before 37 weeks.** A full-term and labour point.

## LI4 — Hegu

*Large Intestine 4*



**Find it.** Back of the hand, on the mound of muscle in the webbing between thumb and index finger.

**Use it.** Press at the start of each contraction, hold through the peak, release as it eases. Swap hands.

**Not before 37 weeks.** A full-term and labour point.

## SP6 — Sanyinjiao

*Spleen 6*



**Find it.** Inside of the lower leg, four fingerwidths above the tip of the inner ankle bone, against the back edge of the shin.

**Use it.** Firm pressure with contractions to support things along. A good one to alternate with the sacrum and hand points.

**Not before 37 weeks.** A full-term and labour point.

## GB21 — Jianjing

Gallbladder 21



**Find it.** Top of the shoulder, the tender spot halfway between the base of the neck and the bony tip of the shoulder.

**Use it.** A partner presses straight down, firm and steady, one to two minutes each side, for the shoulders-up tension that builds when contractions get intense.

**Not before 37 weeks.** A full-term and labour point.

## KD1 — Yongquan

Kidney 1



**Find it.** On the sole, in the hollow that appears in the upper third when you curl the toes, between the lines of the 2nd and 3rd toes.

**Use it.** During labour, when it all feels like too much. A partner leans a firm thumb into the sole and holds, slow and grounding. A good one for the wobble that comes in transition.

**Safe** during labour.

## About Sprout Natural Health

We're a small natural health clinic on the Gold Coast, working with women through pregnancy, fertility and beyond. We see clients in person at our Paradise Point rooms and online across Australia.

**Pre-birth acupuncture.** The practitioner-led version of this handout: weekly sessions from 36 weeks, needles instead of pressure, plus extra points chosen for whatever's going on in your pregnancy. Some clients start weekly from 36 weeks, and we'll work out together what's right for you.

**Naturopathic support.** Our naturopath **Hannah Ward** sees clients online Australia-wide, covering nausea, energy, bloodwork, gestational diabetes risk, and postnatal recovery planning.

- **Book online:** [sproutnaturalhealth.com.au](http://sproutnaturalhealth.com.au)
- **Email:** [hello@sproutnaturalhealth.com.au](mailto:hello@sproutnaturalhealth.com.au)
- **Clinic:** 5/13 Grice Avenue, Paradise Point QLD 4216

### Sources

Point locations and actions are drawn from the standard texts; the pre-birth and labour technique follows Debra Betts' work; the evidence is framed against two Cochrane reviews.

- Betts, D. (2004) 'The use of acupuncture as a routine pre-birth treatment', *Journal of Chinese Medicine*, 76.
- Deadman, P., Al-Khafaji, M. and Baker, K. (2007) *A Manual of Acupuncture*. 2nd edn. Hove: Journal of Chinese Medicine Publications.
- Maciocia, G. (2011) *Obstetrics and Gynaecology in Chinese Medicine*. 2nd edn. Edinburgh: Elsevier Churchill Livingstone.
- Smith, C.A., Armour, M. and Dahlen, H.G. (2017) 'Acupuncture or acupressure for induction of labour', *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews*, 2017(10), CD002962.

- Smith, C.A., Collins, C.T., Levett, K.M. et al. (2020) 'Acupuncture or acupressure for pain management during labour', *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews*, 2020(2), CD009232.

The reviews found the evidence limited and not conclusive, with some support for cervical ripening and for easing labour pain. We've chosen our words to match: encourage, prepare, support, never start or induce.

*This handout is for general education and isn't medical advice. It sits alongside the care of your midwife, obstetrician, GP or acupuncturist, never instead of it. Use the points at your own discretion, check with your maternity team if you're unsure, and stop and call them if anything doesn't feel right.*