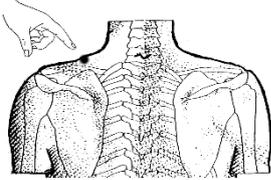
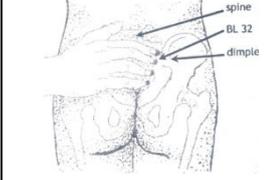
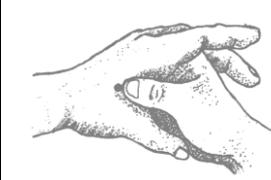
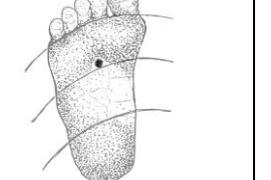


# Acupressure

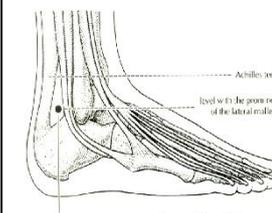
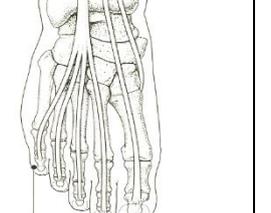
## Optimising beneficial hormonal responses for labour preparation and pain relief during labour

Research demonstrates that acupressure can be used to provide pain relief in labour, and when used as part of a complimentary intervention reduced the need for epidurals and caesarean sections (Smith CA et al 2011; Levett K et al, 2016). While the exact mechanisms are unknown it is thought that these points encourage beneficial hormonal responses.

**Table 1. 'The Big Four'. Frequently used points for pain relief in labour**

GB 21	BL 32	LI4	KID 1
			
Pressure bilaterally with knuckles or elbows as required	Bilaterally into scapular foramen, working down from 2 <sup>nd</sup> scapular foramen	Firm pressure as required	Pressure with knuckles or sea sickness bands to walk on

**Table 2. Points also useful to try.**

Combs on hands	BL 60	SP 6	BL 67
			
Hold comb to stimulate where fingers meet palm or along midpalm	May be useful if baby posterior, or during transition	May be useful if baby is posterior or to assist cervical dilation	Tapping with fingernails or strong pressure for 5-10 mins if baby posterior

### Labour Preparation from 36 weeks.

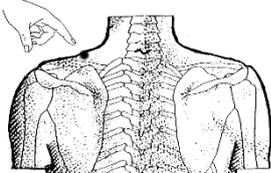
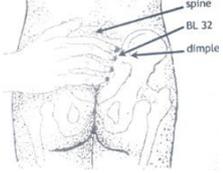
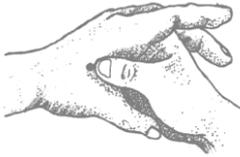
Massage that includes acupressure points can be used from 36 weeks to stimulate beneficial hormones and release tightness in the shoulders and lower back. Ideally this is three times a week.

- Starting from the top of the neck the massage downwards towards the shoulder, releasing any tight areas as you pass through GB 21. Suggested time 5 minutes.
- Starting at BL 32, massage downwards towards the sacrum and out over the buttocks to release any tight areas. Suggested time 5 minutes.
- Starting at the shin bone on the inner leg, massage in small circles with the thumb to the side of the Tibia leg bone through SP 6 until you reach the calf muscles. Be careful to work to a level of comfort as this point will be tender. Suggested time 5 minutes.
- Holding KID 1 with an index finger, place thumb on top of foot and massage up the space between the big toe and second toe until you reach bone. Suggested time 5 minutes.

### Labour Preparation for VBAC, Medical induction or for Rupture of Membranes

When you have a time limit for the onset on labour you can ‘step up’ the acupressure stimulation. This can be 3-4 days before your date for a VBAC, a scheduled medical induction, or if your membranes have ruptured you can commence immediately.

**Table 3. Acupressure when there is a time limit for labour to commence.**

GB 21	BL 32	LI4	SP 6
			
Twice a day for 5-10 minutes	Twice a day for 5-10 minutes	Firm pressure 1-2 minutes every 2 hours Can use opposite side to SP 6	Firm pressure 1-2 minutes every 2 hours Can use opposite side to LI 4

It is recommended that if you do not have a medical time limit for the onset of labour only labour preparation techniques are used. Although the use of the acupressure points in table 3 may stimulate the onset of contractions, this has the potential to result in a labour that does not proceed in the same way as it would have with spontaneous onset. This is because it is known that optimal maternal hormonal levels are only reached a few days before the onset of spontaneous labour and this is also a time when physiological processes relating to the baby reducing amniotic fluid within the lungs and the production of surfactant (related lung function and thought to trigger the onset of labour), take place. It is therefore ideal even when reaching the ‘magic 40’ weeks to allow as many days as possible for these beneficial processes to occur before labour commences.

### Postnatally.

Feedback suggests that acupressure is also useful postnatally. SP 6 can be used to reduce the intensity of the ‘afterpains’ that occur in the first few days and GB 21 for encouraging milk ‘let down’ when you begin breastfeeding.

### Further information and free videos for these acupressure points are available:

<http://acupuncture.rhizome.net.nz/acupressure/>

<https://www.udemy.com/acupressure-for-labour/?couponCode=ACUPRESSURE25>

Phone app: <https://itunes.apple.com/gb/app/acupressure-for-natural-pain/id604942630>

### References

- Smith, C.A., Collins C.T., Crowther C.A., & Levett, K. M. (2011). Acupuncture or acupressure for pain management in labour. *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews*, 7. CD009232. DOI: 10.1002/14651858.
- Levett, Kate M., Smith, C.A., Bensoussan, A. & Dahlen, H.G. (2016). Complementary therapies for labour and birth study: a randomised controlled trial of antenatal integrative medicine for pain management in labour. *BMJ Open*, 2016 Jul 12;6(7):e010691. doi: 10.1136/bmjopen-2015-010691.