

Gena Kirby

*Comfort and Strength in Labor Using the
Rebozo*

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manufactured by
 **FEED FABRIK**

The original blog can be found at
<http://progressive-parenting.com/>

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History of the Rebozo

Tuesday, July 12, 2011



A Rebozo is a traditional Mexican shawl or scarf. For centuries the rebozo has helped women in labor. The rebozo offers support, pain relief and empowerment to the laboring woman, and also to her birth partner. The Rebozo is limitless and can perform many different roles in the lives of women in Mexico and South America.



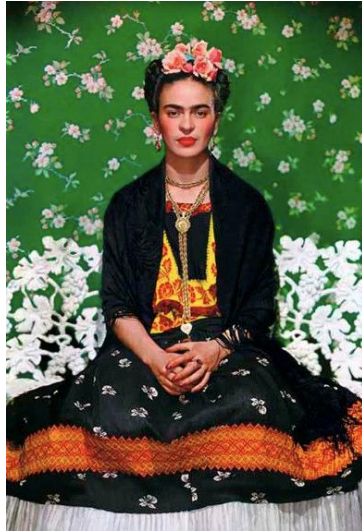
The rebozo can be an aid in labor, a baby carrier, a knapsack, a cool-weather wrap or elegant shawl. The rebozo is limitless.

Although its origin is Moorish, the Rebozo was introduced into Mexico by the Spanish who demanded that Indigenous women cover their heads in church. The word *rebozo* is derived from the Spanish word *rebozar*, meaning to muffle or cover up. Mexican Indigenous women adopted the *Rebozo* not only for use inside but also outside the church and lavishly decorated them. In his 1794 report to the king, Viceroy Rivillagigedo described *rebozos* as “an indispensable part of women’s wardrobes”. He wrote that “the women wear them without exception: the nuns and the highest born and richest ladies and the most unfortunate and poorest women of the lowest class.” By the late 19th century the *rebozo* had become the symbol of Mexican womanhood, and, like the native woman’s *huipil*, identified the wearer’s region or village by its color, arrangement of stripes, fabric and fringe type.



The way a woman draped it around her could even indicate her marital status, perhaps availability. Today it is still the most useful garment in Mexico and used in imaginative ways. A *rebozo* keeps a

woman warm and dry and she uses it to carry her baby and even her young child close to her body. It is also used to protect her head from the sun or rain or can be used to haul bundles on the woman's back. Sometimes it is twisted around the head to balance a water jar. Finally the woman takes it to her grave, wearing it as her shroud.



Today, as in Colonial times, in cosmopolitan cities, Mexico's most elegant and fashionable women still wear brightly colored or elegant black or white *rebozos* woven from natural silk or cotton or silk-like synthetic fabrics around their bare shouldered gowns or over an elegant couture suit when they attend weddings, parties or the theatre.



Now westerners are being introduced to this beautiful multi-faceted expression of Mexican art, history, and culture.





The Many Uses of the Rebozo in Labor

Tuesday, July 12, 2011

THE REBOZO AS AN EXTENSION OF OURSELVES

The rebozo is an extension of ourselves. It is an extension of our arms, of our love and of ancient knowledge and beauty. It supports everyone it contacts in labor. It physically supports the woman in labor, it supports the birth partner by allowing the partner to be

connected to her. The rebozo allows the team to be in contact with one another. The laboring woman is working with and empowered by the rebozo.

There is an African proverb I often quote: “Being pregnant and giving birth are like crossing a narrow bridge. People can accompany you to the bridge. They can greet you on the other side. But you walk that bridge alone”. I look at the rebozo as part of that bridge that the woman walks. Birth is not something to be saved from, but something to be experienced and embraced. We can support the woman on the way to the bridge, and we can have the honor of greeting her on the other side.

THE REBOZO AS PARTNER¹

The rebozo acts as an extra set of hands; if the mother is alone in pre labor or early labor and needs to relieve discomfort in her hips. She can use the rebozo by herself by tying the rebozo tightly around her hips. The rebozo can hold a cold pack or heating pad in place that leaves the birth partner free to give extra attention to the mother.

¹<http://progressive-parenting.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/rebozo-book-251.jpg> ↔



AROMATHERAPY

Aromatherapy can be helpful (ask the soon-to-be mother/your partner before applying a scent, a laboring nose is a sensitive nose). Make sure it is a scent that is pleasing to her. In first phase of labor, the physical pain is less intense and often occurs at equal intervals. However, many women feel anxious, nervous or fearful, particularly if this is their first pregnancy. Lavender oil is mostly used for this phase of labor because it has ability to calm the nerves. Whichever scent she enjoys, spray it onto the rebozo. It's important for her to stay relaxed, since anxiety and fear cause the body to work against itself. Excessive fear can make labor take longer. Use lavender oil with a drop each of rose and herolic to keep you relaxed during active labor. I advise you to carry more than one rebozo to a labor. During the end of the labor she may need help to invigorate herself, to give her the energy she needs to push the baby out. Peppermint and rosemary are good for this purpose. Spray some on your second rebozo at this time.

The most frequently used fragrances are:

Lavender restores unbalanced states to a more harmonious state, and has been said to strengthen contractions. **Chamomile** The “Matriarch” of oils, very gentle, soothing and calming to the mind and body. Helps calm the irritated, fretful or nervous person. **Neroli** This oil may be one of the most effective anti-depressant oils, it is useful for insomnia, hysteria, anxiety and other stress-related conditions. **Bergamot** A “ray of sunshine.” This is said to uplifting, light and refreshing. **Clary Sage** This works well as a muscle relaxant, relieving stress and tension in the body. **NOTE:** Some practitioners advise that this be used during labor only. Before using this during pregnancy contact someone knowledgeable in essential oils.

These are just a few of the many oils available and other guides can help you find oils for revitalization, energy, and different mood creators. The essential oils and useful guides can be found at nearly any health food store, any store where bath supplies are sold, or sometimes by mail order.



Focus and Relaxation

Tuesday, July 12, 2011

During labor the mother can become distracted and she can lose focus, regardless of whether she is at home or in the hospital. Regardless of the distraction, it is the responsibility of the birth partner to be the guardian of focus in this sacred time. Once you have tried to eliminate the obvious distractions, it's time to bring mom back to herself.

Relaxation is not just a passive activity, but an active, conscious release of tension. Doing physical relaxation techniques which release the voluntary muscles helps to reduce physical tension, reducing pain. It also can lead to a feeling of emotional well-being and security; this in turn reduces anxiety, which reduces our sensitivity to pain.

Take the rebozo and fold so that it covers her eyes and ears.



Make the rebozo snug but not too tight, be sure to ask for feedback. Once on, encourage her to focus on her breath and relax. Put one

hand on her forehead and the other on the back of her neck .



Locate the occipital cranial ridge with your fingers. The ridge is located at the back of the head where it meets the top of the neck. This is the point at which spinal fluid enters the skull, and it is often a point of pressure. Use the thumbs to gently rub and knead the ridge. Create a “J” shape with your thumbs over and over again at a rate of 7 or 8 times per minute (this is the same rate as the natural flow of spinal fluid into the area), and this should help relax the mother-to-be. Ask your client/partner if they are comfortable or feeling any distress or pressure at the point the massage is taking place. If the client is not enjoying the massage, then you should stop and look for other areas of tension or distress on shoulders or arms. Massage the occipital ridge for at least 10 minutes. The client should become very relaxed and the pressure felt beneath your thumbs should melt away upon completion of the massage.

During this time you should suggest that she focus on her breathing and her baby. Have her visualize the birth of her baby (or whatever visualization empowers her). Ask her to allow her awareness to be inside her body

THE CHECK-IN



is a relaxation technique that combines patterned breathing with touch relaxation and guided imagery. You ask the woman to release tension from only one body part at a time, to use her exhalations for tension release, and to focus on the decrease in the pressure of

your touch. This technique may be used with either slow or light breathing.

Introduce the technique as follows:

Ask her to breathe in and hold her breath for a few seconds. Ask her to notice the feeling of tension when her lungs are full. As she breathes out, point out the release of tension that comes with the release of air. ”

The technique itself (with slow breathing):

- Note the rhythm of her breathing. Match your breathing to hers, so that you are in synchrony with her.
- While she is breathing in, ask her (in a soothing tone of voice) to focus on the particular body part your rebozo is passing.
- While she is breathing out, ask her to release any tension from that part only.

Gently and *slowly* move the rebozo down the length of her body. Encourage her to soften the parts of her body the rebozo passes. This can be a relaxing practice for women during their pregnancy and early-on in labor. She will discover places in her body she didn't know were causing her discomfort. Have her voice these areas to you. Once she is calm and relaxed, cover her with the rebozo and offer her a light massage concentrating on the areas she mentioned. Breathe with her. This is a wonderful way to connect with her before the big day. When the rebozo passes over her head ask her to find any thoughts that may get in the way during labor and confront them. She does not have to share these thoughts with you. Let her know that if she wishes to she can. During our pre labor meetings I offer this to my client to acquaint her with the rebozo. Many times when we come to this part of the technique she may begin to cry or laugh about that something in her mind that she found during the check in.



On Eye Contact

There are different camps of thought when it comes to eye contact and labor. Some midwives say it's important while others say it's important to let the woman go inside. My experience has taught me that the most important thing is to pay attention to the woman. Her eyes might be closed, and if she seems serene and calm, the best thing to do is to leave her alone.

However, if she has her jaw clenched tight and her brow furrowed, encourage her to relax her forehead (massage her between using your fingertips and ask her to relax and breathe). Do the same to her jaw, gently massage along her jaw line and breathe in and out deeply and slowly with her to remind her to do so (non verbal communication). Encourage her to slightly open her mouth.

Her eyes may be closed at this time if she so wishes.

If you find, however, that she is frightened, encourage her to open her eyes and look into her partner's. Just seeing the face of a person they love can encourage oxytocin release and a sense of calm. Simply by looking into her eyes with calm and genuine love, a doula or partner, can bring a woman back from the edge of fear. Breathe deeply as you gaze into her eyes; encourage her without talking to follow suit. Practice using only your eyes as a communication tool with a partner. Communicate as much love and understanding as possible. It is an art that can be an attainable skill with some practice.



Notice how the mother is breathing and appears just fine within herself. Her partner and I remind her to be mindful of her breath as we breathe with her. We are all connected.

Common Discomfort Relief Techniques

Tuesday, July 12, 2011

Birth does not necessarily have to be painful. Women experience pain in labor differently, some women experience no pain at all. During labor there are muscles being stretched and separation of the pelvic bones can cause discomfort.

Relieving Round Ligament Pain

During pregnancy and labor the mother may experience round ligament pain. Apply light pressure with the rebozo (by gently pulling up) while offering emotional support as you both move side to side. Let her guide you as to how much pressure is helpful. Be mindful and present with your partner/the birthing mother, breathe with her.



Easing Discomfort in the Pelvis

To provide comfort during contractions you can wrap it around her hips and pull toward you. This opens the pelvis in the same way the *double hip squeeze* does. Wrap the rebozo around her hips and help her sit in a chair. Pull the rebozo towards you. Push her knees into her body with your hips to provide even more comfort. Always get feed back from the laboring woman.



;" VIBRATION

As Naoli Vinaver says, “It is impossible to feel discomfort when you are vibrating.” Take the rebozo in both hands and drape it over the hips. Quickly move the fabric back and forth in a vibrating motion as it is distracting and can also work to help a mal-positioned baby. This can be done during and/or between contractions.



Malpositioned Baby

Tuesday, July 12, 2011

Malposition

One of my favorite sites to refer clients or doulas to on the topic of Malpositioned babies is Plus-Size Pregnancy²

Here is what they say about the definition of Malposition.

- Not all resources use the terms correctly, but basically mal-presentations are those in which the baby’s head does not

²<http://www.plus-size-pregnancy.org/malpositions.htm>

present at the cervix first. Malpositions, in contrast, all present with the head down BUT may not be situated in the way that is most optimal for birth. The head may be tilted to one side, the baby may face towards the mother's tummy instead of towards her back, the baby's chin may not be tucked under, or the baby may have a hand/arm up by its head. All of these are head-down, but the subtle variations may cause labor to be harder, more drawn out, more painful, or even cause the baby to get 'stuck'. All can usually be fixed (or may resolve on their own) so that the baby can be born vaginally, but there is a high rate of problems if the position is not resolved.

The following positions using the rebozo can help a malpositioned baby find her way to the cervix. Plus Size Pregnancy has a great analogy to explain how these work.

A good analogy is a key (the baby) and a lock (the mother's pelvis). If the key is aligned properly, it slides right into the lock, turns easily, the door opens, and the person moves through. However, if the key is upside down (posterior), sideways (occiput transverse), or even slightly angled to the side (asynclitic), the key has a hard time getting into the lock, let alone getting the person through the door. The solution is either to pull back the key and then turn it to align it with the lock, or to jiggle the key until it works its way into place. Similarly, with babies, the solution is either to ease the baby out of the pelvis so it can turn more easily, or to 'jiggle' the baby through maternal shifts in position so that it can work its way into place.

Sutton and Scott³ (the midwife and childbirth educator who authored *Optimal Foetal Positioning*) attribute many baby malpositions to poor maternal posture due to our modern conveniences like easy chairs, plus a decrease in exercising. Because the following positions all reduce

³<http://openlibrary.org/books/OL22278628M/> ↔
Understanding_and_teaching_optimal_foetal_positioning

the amount of space in the anterior part of the pelvis (which may predispose a baby towards a posterior position), they recommend:

- Avoid sitting with the hips lower than the knees
- Avoid lying back with the feet up
- Avoid slouching back in a chair
- Avoid bucket seats in cars
- Avoid sitting with the legs crossed

Birth Ball Support



Not every woman feels comfortable sitting on a birth ball. The rebozo does a number of things in this situation. It supports the laboring woman, it helps her feel safe and secure. If she loses her balance you or her partner are there to help.

Reposition the baby towards the cervix. Sitting on the birth ball with feet solidly on the floor and hips fluid and making circles

for 20 minutes. Have a helper near by and have a railing of some sort to hang on to or a person behind you to rest back on between contractions if you get tired.

Rapid circles on the birth ball seem more helpful in bringing the baby down into the pelvis than slow circles. Use upbeat music to keep the pace. Be present and mindful of your own body and needs, don't hurt yourself.

PELVIC Lift & TILT

When to do it:

Use the pelvic lift & tilt when labor contractions are frequent enough that you can predict when another is coming. This is because you will want to move into position as soon as, but not before, the contraction starts. If you start too late it will be uncomfortable, so just wait to start with the following contraction.

There are only two times you will use this. To encourage labor contractions to be closer together and get stronger when they have been at one strength for a long time (or dilation is not increasing), or in the presence of painful back labor. Either way, this helps move the position of the babies head and this will improve the labor progress and relieve the pain in her back.

It can be used in latent or prelabor. The Abdominal Lift can be used as active labor gets underway.



Penny Simpkin and spinning babies call this the abdominal lift &

do this method with the mother lifting her belly with her hands. I like using the rebozo as you can get more even pressure and mom doesn't have to work AS hard. HOWEVER, some moms prefer doing it themselves. Offer both options to your clients.

Hands and knees / kneeling

Support your client during the hands and knees position. The rebozo is lifted slightly to support the weight of the baby.

Can relieve back pain, help a posterior baby rotate, allows easy access for backrubs / counterpressure massage; makes it possible to sway side to side, rock back and forth, or do pelvic tilts to aid rotation and increase comfort. Having knee pads or kneeling on something soft will help knees. Can rest upper body on pillows, chair, or birth ball.





The vibration method.

Lay the rebozo over the laboring woman's hips and buttocks and grab the rebozo right at her hips. Push the rebozo down and pull down right to left very quickly to create a vibrating movement. Naoli Vinaver⁴ says that if women have not been sexually active with a partner, the woman become blocked. She claims this blockage can get in the way of labor. The vibrational motion of the rebozo on the laboring woman can have the effect of shaking lose this blocked energy and help the labor to come along. This technique can also help a malpositioned baby find their way back to the cervix. Women report it feeling very nice and say that it is a nice distraction during contractions. Naoli says it is very difficult to feel bad if you are vibrating.

⁴<http://www.nacimientonatural.com/Naoli-Vinaver/Bienvenida.html>



The Manteada method:

The manteada is the basic rebozo movement which rocks the mother back and forth in the hammock of the rebozo. Manteada means a rocking or sifting motion. This is ideal for a women in later pregnancy to alleviate back pain, relax the nervous system, relax the ligaments of the uterus and allow more room in the uterus for the baby to move into the best position for labor.

The rebozo is laid out on the ground. The mother lays perpendicular to the length of the scarf with her lower back and bottom on the center of the scarf. Pick up the ends of the scarf in either hand while standing over the mother and gently holding her weight in the scarf. Her body is still on the ground, but she feels wrapped up and held. Gently pull the ends of the rebozo simultaneously up and toward her feet. This creates a traction on the lower back and spine. Pregnant moms in their third trimester will usually vocalize their relief in some way to let you know its being done correctly.

Come up to the center above the woman and begin gently to rock her hips side to side; simultaneously create a rhythmic movement with the

rebozo by pulling up with the left hand, then the right. Begin slowly, then gently increase in the speed and movement of the rocking, so that the mother is completely relaxed and comfortable. Be sure to check with her so you know how she is feeling. The great majority (99%) of the time women LOVE this, unless they are very uncomfortable being on their back. However, because of the rocking motion and support of the spine, having a woman lie on her back during pregnancy (or in early labor) with the manteada method is safe and feels great.

Rock the mothers hips for 5-15 minutes, until your arms get tired. This is a great technique in the third trimester and in early labor. This is also a great way for the birth partner to feel involved.



Effective Positioning for Birth

Tuesday, July 12, 2011

Many women in labor will say things like; “I don’t know if I’m doing it right!” They don’t feel as if their pushes are effective. Try this at home. Sit on the floor like the woman in the photo below. Pretend to

push. Now have someone hold a rebozo or shawl or towel and pull on it while pushing. Did you feel it? Did you feel the difference between the two? When you are pulling on the rebozo you are engaging your core muscles. You are using your muscles more efficiently.



Here she is supported by her partner in a supported squat



The same idea but this time she is seated.



Here the partner provides counter pressure during pushing



This is another variation of the supported squat. If no one is home the mother can throw a knotted rebozo over a door while she labors and waits for her partner or midwife.

Go There With Her

Tuesday, July 12, 2011

GO *THERE* WITH HER

I believe the birth partner needs to be supported as much as the mother. The rebozo also offers support to this working partner. They both become connected through the rebozo. They are both laboring, working and moving together. The woman giving birth is supported physically and the partner is as well, mentally. It is important for the partner to “work” during labor. If they are actively involved they are more likely to be in the moment, as opposed to a birth partner who is on their phone or reading a book. Or busy looking at a monitor.

In this way the birth partner is focused and also working with the woman. In this way the chances are greater for the birth partner to enter the same brain wave pattern as the woman giving birth!

You cannot interrupt a laboring woman when you are in the same state she is in. You cannot disrupt her if you are in synch with her... now, you are *THERE* with her.



