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Pregnancy

Welcome to this Healthy Living To Go podcast from Kaiser Permanente, designed to fit the way you live and the way you learn, listen, live well, and thrive.

[Music]

Healthy Pregnancy

I'm Belleruth Naparstek and this is Guided Imagery designed to engage the power of your mind, body and spirit, to help you have a safe, healthy pregnancy. Guided Imagery is gentle but powerful. It's been shown to help reduce anxiety, depression, and fatigue, and to increase confidence in the sense of wellbeing. It can reach places inside of you that conscious thinking sometimes can't. This Guided Imagery has been carefully researched, written, and tested. Every word, phrase, image, and idea has a good reason for being here. Try to listen to this once or twice a day for at least several weeks. Over time it will have a stronger and stronger effect. After a while you may want to take a break from it, try some others, and then come back to it later. Different parts of this will probably capture your attention at different times. Always feel free to ignore or change the parts that don't suit you. Your unconscious mind will probably do that for you anyway. You don't need to pay perfect attention for this to work. In fact, your mind will probably drift in and out, or you may even fall asleep; that's fine, especially with repeated listening. If you notice your mind wandering you can gently guide it back. And because this imagery is designed to help you become relaxed it's best not to play it while driving. You can listen to the affirmations anytime. If you position your hands the same way each time you listen this will become a kind of conditioning cue. Later you'll be able to use this positioning to move very quickly into a place of deep inner relaxation. So for now see if you can take this next while to commit yourself to this process of engaging the power of your imagination by gently immersing yourself in this safe, easy process. All you have to do is settle in, relax, and let yourself listen.

To begin with, see if you can take a moment to check your position, shifting your weight so that your body feels well supported, especially your back and your legs. You may even want to have a pillow under your knees if you're lying down or behind your lower back if you're seated. And gently allowing your eyelids to close, letting your hands rest comfortably on your body, on your chest or midriff or abdomen, so you can feel the rise of your body as you breathe in and the way settles back down as you breathe out. So more and more, you can become attuned to the feel of your own breath, moving in and out of your body. Breathing in as fully as you comfortably can. And breathing out completely and easily, and with the next in breath, imagining that you're sending the warm energy of your breath to any part of your body that's sore or tense or tight, and releasing the tension with the exhale. So you can feel your breath going to all the tight, cramped places, warming and loosening and softening them, and breathing out the discomfort, lifting up and carrying out all the tension, on the strong, wide back of the out breath.

Breathing deeply into the heart of any fatigue, energizing your body with the power of the breath, and exhaling weariness with each out of breath. Breathing into any unwelcome thoughts or worries, and breathing them out with the out breath, so that for just a moment, the mind can be empty. For just a split second, it can be free and clear space, and you're blessed with the stillness. Breathing into any emotions that may be rocking around inside, emotions that can rise and subside on waves of powerful hormones washing through you, and releasing them with the out breath. So more and more, you can become balanced and steady. Your emotional self still and quiet, like a lake with no ripples. More and more aware of the healing action of your own breath as you inwardly affirm your intention to support and nourish this new life inside of you, and knowing that your body has the built-in intelligence to do this. To do whatever is needed. That your body is your trustworthy, intelligent, ally. And you may have noticed how easily your attention is drawn inward. The gentle preoccupation with the soft, dark chambers of your interior where the sweet secrets of new life lay folded, tucked away, all safe and cozy. Your whole body is smiling with the knowledge of how each beat of your heart surges nourishment and pulses strength, suffusing this new being with everything it needs. Feeling the soft weight of your hands on your body, the warmth from your hands soaking into layers of tissue, deeper and deeper, sending a greeting and a blessing inward, pleased to be joining the company of all the women who have come before you and all the women who will come after you, and feeling their same sense of wonder and awe and gratitude for the impeccable intelligence of your body. It sees to every detail, ensuring that an embryo, alights and lodges in rich, soft, nourishing tissue, becoming firmly anchored so that a tiny cluster of cells can multiply with stunning speed. A profusion of intense, perfectly orchestrated activity. Each tiny element knowing exactly what to do, what to become. The wisdom of the body surrounding a delicate budding embryo with a protective, mucous coating, so it won't be mistaken for alien tissue and accidentally expelled from the body. Entrusting that the body also knows when that is necessary, when to let it all go and start anew. The intelligence of the body, supporting a whole new being and offering a gentle cushion of warm, welcoming fluid all around the tender growing fetus to absorb jarring movements and harsh sounds and offer extra nourishment. The genius of the body, assisting creation by building a whole new organ. The multi-talented placenta, perfectly positioned between mother and child to guard against harm and keep out infection and toxicity, but ingeniously allowing in sustenance. A diligent, discriminating gatekeeper and protector. And you might be becoming more and more aware of the flexibility of your skin and tissue of your muscle and joints that can so generously accommodate this growing, new life. Able to expand, to make as much room as is needed, and knowing, too, that the body will just as ingeniously subside and contract, returning skin and tissue, muscle and joints, to normal position and size when the time is right. Understanding that the mouth of the uterus knows how to stay tightly sealed with the extra protection of its natural, built-in mucous cork. An ingenious device, thick and tight, to keep the baby extra safe, sealed off from sources of infection. All the while, uterine muscles rehearsing and toning, warming up with occasional contractions, so that when the time is right, it can move into capable action with efficiency and ease, and you can be confident in the knowledge that even the discomfort you might feel from time to time comes from the purposeful activity of your body, comes from new hormone levels, increased blood flow, and all the new requirements for new life. Every cell, supporting the divine alchemy inside of you, so your body can hold and nourish this precious new being, every fiber, every cell, every neuron, every biochemical message utterly committed to one overriding mission, to keep mother and baby safe and strong. And still feeling the soft weight on your hands on your body, the warmth from your hands soaking into layers of tissue, deeper and deeper, sending a

greeting and a blessing to the baby inside. And knowing that your heartbeat, your voice, your body heat, your gait, your touch, your laughter, and your love can be felt at some level by this little being tucked away so safe and warm inside of you, so connected to you, and perhaps connected to other things, as well. To the cushion of energy surrounding the two of you, gently protecting and enclosing you both, a cushion of sparkling, humming energy, dancing and pulsing all around you. Drawing to it all the love and sweetness that has ever been felt by anyone at any time. Every prayer and good wish. Every smile and gesture of gratitude. Every gentle, loving act, pulling it all in like a powerful magnet. Calling every good wish home, and developing you with protection and support. And perhaps also sensing in this cushion the presence of smiling ancestors, leaning over and softly whispering this child's name. Transferring to this baby their highest hopes and deepest intentions to pick up their banner and carry the best of what they stood for and grant sensing too, the warm presence of other guardians and allies, sweet spirits, magical beings, teachers and guides, animal helpers, guardian angels, old and dear friends, crooning soft lullabies, in low loving voices and carrying gifts tenderly offered and offering visions and dreams and guidance. Promises and blessings, and you might even feel on your skin the warmth and magic of these helpers all around you, guarding your dreams and ensuring your safety. And you know with your whole being, in the deepest part of your heart, that this new life was a gift like no other. Part of the great chain, necessary and perfect and will leave the world a better place for having been and it. Understanding that this is your wish and your intentions and your blessing, and so, you can once again feel your breath in your belly, strong and steady, sending nourishment and strength with each beat of your heart. To the treasured life at your center, in the great company of all the women who have come before you, and all the women who will come after you, and feeling the soft, lush, fullness of your body, grateful for the beauty and intelligence of its perfect design and the absolute miracle of it. And so, feeling your hands and your feet, you can once again open your eyes and come back into the room, knowing in a deep place that you are better for this, and so you are.

Affirmations are positive statements designed for repeated listening, a sort of reprogramming of your unconscious mind to combat negative thinking. Over time affirmations can make some fairly profound changes in attitude. For some people affirmations are more effective and appealing than guided imagery. See if you can listen to each statement in a state of open, relaxed attention, breathing in deeply with each one and repeating it softly to yourself either aloud or in your mind. I affirm my intention to support and sustain this new life inside of me and to do my best to take good care of myself and this baby. [Music]

I know that my body is perfectly designed to support and nourish the two of us.

[Music]

I am grateful for the impeccable intelligence and ingenious design of my body.

[Music]

I watch the changes in my body with awe and respect for the genius of this exquisite design.

[Music]

I delight in the knowledge that every beat of my heart is surging life and strength into this new life growing inside of me.

[Music]

It pleases me to know that a new life is tucked away inside my body, safe and cozy, cushioned and protected.

[Music]

I understand the shifting hormones designed to help my body support this new life might create temporary discomfort or fatigue, and I accept this for what it is.

[Music]

I applaud my growing resiliency and strength allowing me to celebrate the changes that are happening to my body and my life.

[Music]

I know there are times when I become anxious, fearful, ambivalent, resentful or sad. And I accept what I feel as my inner truth of the moment.

[Music]

I understand that my condition might exaggerate these feelings.

[Music]

I know that the more I can acknowledge and accept my feelings without criticism or blame the more I can allow them to flow through me.

[Music]

I am becoming better and better at focusing my attention back to my own inner peacefulness.

[Music]

I know that when I let go of harsh expectations and unrealistic demands on myself and others the more I assist my natural tendency to be strong and well.

[Music]

More and more I can allow myself to let go of worries about things I can't control and focus on my own inner peacefulness. [Music]

More and more I can open my heart to my own feelings of love, peace and gratitude.

[Music]

I know that when I can let go of worry and appreciate the beauty of the moment I assist my body's natural tendency to be strong and well.

[Music]

I can see and feel radiant sunlight entering and warming my body sending a blessing of comfort and peace deep into my heart.

[Music]

I can see and feel a powerful blue green wave of healing washing through me from head to toe clearing away any unwanted debris and taking it out with the tide.

[Music]

I can see and feel a warm, pulsing, glowing blanket of magical comfort enveloping me with peace and safety.

[Music]

More and more I can forgive myself and others for errors of the past.

[Music]

I know that when I can let go of old pain, anger, resentment and fear I am better and better able to be strong and well.

[Music]

I know that I am learning to listen to my body and sense what it needs.

[Music]

More and more I understand that my body is my ally, my oldest friend, my steadiest companion.

[Music]

I know that when I appreciate my body, respect it and take good care of it I assist its natural ability to be strong and well.

[Music]

I know that when I take time to appreciate the beauty all around me I help my body's natural tendency to be strong and well.

[Music]

More and more I can breathe into the heart of any discomfort, soften it and release it with the out breath.

[Music]

I am pleased to be joining the company of all the women who have come before me and all the women who will come after me feeling the same wonder and gratitude.

[Music]

I am grateful to the wisdom of my body for knowing in every detail how to support this new life and keep it safe. [Music]

It pleases me to think that my body is cushioning, protecting and strengthening this baby growing inside of me.

[Music]

I marvel at the flexibility of my skin and muscle and joints as they accommodate this growing life.

[Music]

I know that my body will just as ingeniously subside and contract when the time is right.

[Music]

More and more I am aware of how my heartbeat, movements, voice, laughter and touch can be perceived by this baby from deep inside my body.

[Music]

I feel myself and my baby surrounded and protected by a magical cushion of energy filled with all the love and sweetness that have ever been sent our way.

[Music]

I sense this cushion pulling in good wishes and prayers to me and my baby like a powerful magnet.

[Music]

I sense the presence of smiling ancestors all around me crooning lullabies and carrying gifts, offering visions and guidance, promises and dreams.

[Music]

I hear them whispering to this child its name as they hold out the banner of their highest hopes and deepest intentions. [Music]

I applaud the lush fullness of my body, grateful for its nourishing beauty and wisdom.

[Music]

I invite assistance from my friends and loved ones, past, present and future to lend me their support and good will. [Music]

I see myself surrounded by their love and caring, and I feel it all over my body like a warm wave.

[Music]

More and more I can sense that I am cushioned and protected by all the love and sweetness that has ever been felt for me by anyone at any time.

[Music]

I salute my own strength, resiliency and resourcefulness in my commitment to nourish this child and to be strong and well.

[Music]

I am grateful for the impeccable intelligence and ingenious design of my body.

[Music]

I delight in the knowledge that every beat of my heart is surging life and strength into this new life growing inside of me.

[Music]

More and more I can allow myself to let go of worrying about things I can't control and focus on my own inner peacefulness.

[Music]

I am pleased to be joining the company of all the women who have come before me and all the women who will come after me feeling their same wonder and gratitude.

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[Music]

I hear them whispering to this child its name as they hold out the banner of their highest hopes and deepest intentions. [Music]

I applaud the lush fullness of my body grateful for its nourishing beauty and wisdom.

[Music]

More and more, I know that I am perfectly, utterly safe.

[Music]

And so you are.

[Music]

Welcome to this Healthy Living To Go podcast from Kaiser Permanente, designed to fit the way you live and the way you learn, listen, live well, and thrive.

Successful Childbirth

I'm Belleruth Naparstek and this is Guided Imagery designed to engage the power of your mind, body and spirit, to help you have a safe, healthy satisfying delivery. If possible try to listen to this several times before your delivery, once or twice a day for a couple of weeks if you can. But keep in mind this will help you even if the first time you hear it is during your actual labor. Childbirth is a naturally altered state so it will be easy for you to respond to this imagery. You don't want to start listening too early in your pregnancy. Start at what you think will be the last couple of weeks. Remember if you've been using imagery for your pregnancy all along you've already gotten very good at this. Pay attention to the parts that you need to hear and play them as often as you need to during your labor. During delivery you'll probably need to follow the specific suggestions of your nurses, doctor, or midwife so feel free to use this imagery to supplement your healthcare in the way that works best for you. If you position your hands the same way each time you listen during your weeks before you go into labor this will become a kind of conditioning cue. Later you'll be able to use this hand positioning plus your breathing to move very quickly into a place of comfort and relaxation during much of your labor. Try not to have a fixed idea of how you think the labor and delivery should go. The more flexible you can be the better off you are. There are many wonderful ways to do this. So for now see if you can take this next while to commit yourself to this process of engaging the power of your imagination by gently immersing yourself in this safe and easy process. All you have to do is focus in and let my voice guide you.

To begin with, see if you can take a moment to check your position, shifting your weight so that your body feels well supported, especially your back and your legs. You may want to have a pillow under your knees if you're lying down or behind your lower back if you're seated. And gently allowing your eyelids to get heavy and close. Letting your hands rest comfortably on your body, on your chest or midriff or abdomen, so you can feel the rise of your body as you breathe in and the way it settles back down as you breathe out. So more and more you can become attuned to feel of your breath moving in and out of your body. Breathing in as fully as you comfortably can and breathing out completely and easily. And with the next in-breath, imagining that you're sending the warm energy of your breath to any part of your body that's sore or tense or tight and releasing tension with the exhale so you can feel your breath

going to any tight, cramped places, warming and loosening and softening them and breathing out discomfort, lifting it up and carrying it out on the strong, wide back of your out-breath. Breathing deeply into any fatigue, energizing your body with the power of the breath and exhaling weariness, breathing into any unwelcomed thoughts or worries and breathing them out with the breath. More and more able to clear and steady your mind with the power of your breath so that for just a moment, your mind can be empty. For just a split second it is free and clear space, and you're blessed with stillness. Breathing into any emotions that may be rocking around inside and releasing them with the out-breath so that more and more, you can become balanced and steady, still and quiet, like a lake with no ripples, becoming attuned to the healing action of your own breath as you affirm in your own mind your intention to deliver this baby in a safe and healthy way. To put the full power of your mind, body, and spirit behind doing this and knowing that you are not alone in this. That along with the strong hands and good hearts that are physically here with you, committed to your well-being and that of your baby, there are invisible forces as well, and knowing that by imagining them around you now, you invoke their assistance in an even stronger way. And you might already be aware of the cushion of energy softly surrounding you and this baby, gently protecting you both, a field of magical, intelligent energy, sparkling and humming with light and color, puffing all around you. And you might even feel it dancing on your skin, a force field all around you drawing to it all the love and sweetness that has ever been sent your way. Every prayer and good wish, every smile and gesture of gratitude, every gentle, loving act, pulling it all in like a powerful magnet, calling every good wish home and sensing in this cushion the presence of smiling ancestors leaning over and softly whispering this child's name, transferring their highest hopes and deepest intentions that this child will pick up their banner and carry the best of what they stood for. And perhaps sensing the warm presence of all the special ones from your life, alive or long gone, those who love and protect you, trust and guide you, and wish you well from their hearts. Accompanied, too, by sweet spirits, magical beings, teachers and guides, animal helpers, guardian angels, old and dear friends, lending you their strengths and their blessing, joining their intention to yours to see you through this delivery in a safe and healthy way. And you know that your body already knows how to do this, understanding that your body is a trustworthy ally perfectly organized to go into action, every cell committed with a built-in intelligence that's been distilled and honed through the ages by centuries of women who have come before you doing as you're doing now, feeling the way you do. So in a sense, they, too, are all behind you now. Strong and steady, patient and knowing, smiling as they remember their own journey into power and mystery of motherhood, knowing that your body has been practicing all along, that during your pregnancy the muscles of your uterus have been rehearsing and toning, warming up with occasional contractions, the uterus hardening like a ball and then softly releasing so when the time is right, it can move into capable action with efficiency and ease. And so now, as your contractions begin to settle into a regular pattern and you become aware of a more reliable rhythm, you know that you, too, have been rehearsing and toning so you can feel ready and strong as you breathe in and out, deeply and easily, with each contraction, sending the warm energy of the breath all around and through the bowed muscle of the uterus and letting the power of the breath go right into the heart of the contraction and helping it soften and release. Knowing that you have the time and the ability to master different levels of intensity if you want to do so because you are breathing deeply and steadily with each one. Plenty of time in the intervals to rest and get ready for the next flexing of powerful muscle. Proud of the strength in your body, hidden under its apparent softness and

roundness. Knowing that each time your uterus tenses and releases, it's accomplishing exactly what is needed, no more, no less. Giving you time to rest and get ready for the next piece of progress. Slowly but surely affecting the flattening and opening of the neck of the uterus a little more each time, thinning and stretching the cervix as you continue to breathe in fully and deeply. And breathe out as completely as you can. Time to rest and breathe, smile and talk, and gather up more strength. And you might notice that you have available to you huge reservoirs of energy because you are being helped by waves of hormones washing through you, ingenious biochemical messengers at your service to lend you stamina, ease discomfort, and keep you peaceful but ready. And you know that this baby has the same kind of assistance, the waves of hormones all through its tiny body to keep it flexible and strong, able to withstand the hard work of being born, perfectly equipped for this one-in-a-lifetime journey. And so, more and more, the tubular neck of the uterus defaces, ingeniously flattening and thinning and stretching so that it can slowly but surely become a portal. And you know that even the discomfort that you may or may not feel from time to time is evidence of this purposeful activity of your body doing what it was born to do just as it has for generations of women who have come before you and who will come after you. Continuing to focus on the breath. And you may find it necessary to shift into shorter breaths deliberately panting as the contractions gain in intensity and the cervix opens wider. And perhaps you can sense the cushion of energy around you getting denser, pulling in even more protection and support and encouragement. Scores of helpers surrounding you, lending their blessings and prayers, smiles and good wishes, along with those who physically attend you in your room, looking after you with great competence and care, with capable, respectful hands, along with partners and family members with loving hearts who share your awe for this miraculous process. So ordinary and yet so magical. And you know that at the time when you feel the most discomfort, the most impatience, the most irritation, that this is the time when the most work is being done, that the end is in sight, that the final stretch is practically here, when the baby's head can push down and rotate, and everything is ready, in position for the most active and satisfying phase of the work. And now, if you can feel it, your body wants to bear down with each powerful contraction. Every fiber of your being impelled to bear down and push out this baby with a commitment and a force like no other. But you can also let your caregivers coach you, helping you hold back with panting breaths and telling you when to push so that the momentum you are gathering is just strong enough, collecting at just the right intensity to deliver this baby with a minimum of stress. And you might be surprised to see that this part is not so difficult, that the hardest part is, in fact, over and that this compelling impulse to bear down and push with each contraction is satisfying because it is the only thing your body wants to do. And if the baby is positioned in such a way that help is required, you know that expert hands will take over the effort, gently guiding the baby out with great skill and careful, caring hands. A natural anesthesia infusing your whole pelvic floor as the head is delivered. And with just a few more pushes and very easily now, the rest of the baby is born, looking, perhaps, a bit bedraggled and baffled as it is startled by bright light and loud noise, the odd feel of cool air on wet skin, the shock of breathing through brand new lungs, no longer able to filter the world through the muffled kindness of your body. But liking it best on your warm belly, near your heartbeat, as the cord is cut. And you know that this innocent already knows the sound of your voice, the rhythm of your breathing. And you can be filled with relief and delight, intrigued with the empty sensation in your belly, curious and eager to see and touch and hear this new member of the family that has been part of you for so long. And you can inhale deep, full breaths feeling grateful and happy to be alive to have seen

this day, to have created this baby, and knowing that you can hold and feed and talk to this baby, and knowing that your ever-resourceful body is organizing itself even now for the next step. And changes are already occurring in your breasts right now, and your uterus is already beginning to return to its normal size. But for now, there's this feeling of relief and accomplishment and joy and gratitude and the beginnings of a tenderness like no other that you may feel right away or that may gradually overtake you over the next days and weeks and months, until one day you realize that your capacity to feel love is beyond anything you ever imagined, that your heart has been opened wider than you ever thought possible. Proud to have joined the company of women who have come before you and all the women who will come after you. Still aware of the presence of smiling ancestors leaning over and softly whispering this baby's name, transferring their highest hopes and deepest intentions to pick up their banner and carry the best of what they stood for. And still sensing the warm presence of all the other guardians and allies, crooning soft lullabies in low, loving voices, carrying gifts tenderly offered, and offering visions and guidance, promises and blessings. And you might feel on your skin the warmth and strength of all of these helpers all around you. And whether this experience has gone exactly as you had pictured it or took some unexpected turns, you understand that it doesn't matter because you know with your whole being in the deepest part of your heart that this new life is a gift like no other, part of the great chain necessary and perfect, and will leave the world a better place for having been in it, understanding this is your wish and your intention and your blessing, and knowing in a deep place that you are better for this. And so you are.

[Music]