What do sitting, standing, kneeling and squatting all have in common? Give up? These four positions are all ways women can give birth.

Are you surprised? It’s no wonder! It seems to be a common assumption in America that all women give birth on their backs. We see this notion reflected on TV, in books and even from the mouths of our family members. But the on-your-back position is not the best for every laboring woman, and in some cases, it can even increase pain and cause tearing.

Because labor is such an individual experience, the way you position your body should be up to you. Perhaps you feel like taking a relaxing shower or sitting in a chair so hubby can massage your shoulders. Whatever makes you comfortable is right for your unique labor experience.

Are you drawing a blank when trying to think of other positions in which you can labor? Not to worry. We’ve compiled eight that can make your time in the labor and delivery room shorter and much more comfortable.

1) Kneeling
This position involves kneeling on a comfortable surface, such as the labor bed, a blanket, a birth ball or a beanbag, and leaning forward on either a support person or another surface like a table or pillows.

“Kneeling is especially comfortable if mom’s tailbone is sore,” says Sheri Menelli, author of *Journey into Motherhood: Inspirational Stories of Natural Birth*, as it relieves the pressure that would occur if you were to sit or lie down. And because gravity is working for you, contractions are stronger and labor can sometimes be shorter.

Kneeling is also great if you want a back rub. Since your back is exposed and stretched out, this is the perfect time for the dad-to-be to massage your fatigued shoulders and back, Menelli says.

2) Standing
If you feel like standing during your delivery, you can do so at your bedside or leaning against a wall or support person. If you lean against someone, try wrapping your arms around his or her neck for added support. Not only can this sense of closeness increase feelings of maternal comfort, says Dr. Anne B. Broussard, CNM, DNS, of the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, but “contractions [will also be] stronger and more...
Brenda Stokes is lying on her back in a birthing pool. She is also seated with her knees up on her hands and knees. Down the birth canal, you can even spend time in the shower to help relieve the baby better circulation. Also, if your baby's heart rate decelerates, for example, you'll have fewer options because emergency intervention might become a necessity. Also, if you plan on having an epidural, realize that you will not have the same sort of mobility as you would without one. If you have one, you'll be hooked up to an IV, which will make it difficult for you to move around. Plus, the lower half of your body will be partially or completely numb, so you'll have a hard time maneuvering yourself into different positions. Some hospitals won't allow you to move much after you get an epidural because you could hurt yourself. Many women find alternative labor positions very comfortable, says Menelli, and opt out of getting an epidural altogether.

3) Side-Lying

The side-lying position is pretty self-explanatory—you just lie on your side in bed. Broussard suggests having your partner hold up your top leg or putting a few pillows under that top leg for support. Most experts, including Broussard, recommend lying on your left side rather than your right, because this gives you and the baby better circulation. Also, if your blood pressure is too high, it may come down while you're in this position, says Menelli. Just be careful because this position can cause your labor to stall, which might actually be a good thing if you're having a fast birth and want to slow it down, or if you and baby need a break before letting labor progress further.

4) On All Fours

Much like the kneeling position, the on-all-fours position involves kneeling on a comfortable surface, but you also lean forward onto your hands. "Mom may instinctively take this position if she's experiencing any back labor," says Menelli, as "it allows the baby to move off the nerves." Even if you don't have back labor, the on-all-fours position is great for relieving other back pain and can actually help rotate the baby into a better birthing position because you get help from gravity. You can even rock your partner back and forth a bit while in this position to ease pressure and help the baby move further down the birth canal.

5) Sitting

This position can be performed in several ways. Whether you decide to sit with crossed legs on the bed, in a chair, with your legs over the bed or sitting backwards on the toilet, the downward pull of gravity when you're sitting "helps to open up the pelvic region," Menelli says. Sitting crossed-legged in bed with the headboard upright can give you optimum back support. But you may prefer to have your back exposed for massage opportunities. If so, straddle a chair, a beanbag or the toilet. Menelli says that sitting on the toilet "many times will allow mom to let go of the muscles that are holding the baby in," which will help your little one get here sooner.

6) Squatting

Any surface is fine to practice the squatting position, but your heels should be flat on the floor in a wide stance. "When the position is done properly there, there is true stability," says Kim Wildner, childbirth educator, doula and author of Mother's Intuition: How Relief Shaped Birth. Your partner can also support you from behind as you squat on the floor. Gravity helps the fetus descend, says Broussard, but she notes that most women will not be able to hold this position for long periods of time. Practicing it before you go into labor can help you learn to balance yourself better and can strengthen your leg muscles so you can stay squatting longer. You may ultimately decide to deliver in this position as well, as it shortens the birth canal considerably.

7) Birthing Tub

Just about any position can be performed in a birthing tub. Because the water relieves pressure on the body and reduces the heaviness of the belly, it is often called "Nature's Epidural," says Menelli. Warm water can be very soothing and allows you to change positions more freely. The labor can even progress more quickly due to your increased relaxation level, Broussard says. Not only is the birthing tub relaxing, but it also makes for a "warm transition into the outside world" for baby, according to Menelli. For more information on the art of water births, please visit www.WaterBirth.org.

8) Shower

Many positions can be done in the shower, like standing, sitting or squatting. Water helps the baby's heart, says Menelli, a labor hormone that promotes increased uterine activity. The sound of the running water can also be very soothing and allow you to relax more freely. Laboring in the shower is especially beneficial to women who are experiencing back labor, because you can angle the water to hit your back. You can even spend time in the shower with your partner. Menelli says many women find that slight pressure against their lower backs provides significant relief during contractions. Your partner can stand behind you to provide form support, or you can stand face-to-face while draping your arms around his neck. Whatever feels best is what you should go with.

Choosing a Position

Picking a labor position isn't exactly something you can predict, says Menelli. But she notes that most women will not be able to hold this position for long periods of time. Practicing it before you go into labor can help you learn to balance yourself better and can strengthen your leg muscles so you can stay squatting longer. You may ultimately decide to deliver in this position as well, as it shortens the birth canal considerably.

How did you deliver your last baby?

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>23%</td>
<td>Lay down on my back</td>
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<tr>
<td>73%</td>
<td>Use my partner’s arms</td>
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<tr>
<td>2%</td>
<td>Sit on an all-fours position</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2%</td>
<td>Sit on an all-fours position and move</td>
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About the Author: Brenda Stokes is a freelance writer and full-time student from southern California.