



# Your Labour

## What you need to know

# Your labour

Everyone's labour is different. This booklet will help you to understand what happens in labour, how your body responds and what things you can do to help.

## Early labour

**What is happening?** This is the beginning stage of labour and is when your cervix is softening, thinning and beginning to open, and your baby is moving down deeper into your pelvis. This part of labour can last a few hours or a few days, for some women it can stop and start.

You may have period-type cramps; low backache; mild contractions lasting a few seconds or up to a whole minute or more. These can be regular or have no real pattern. Your waters may break, and you may have a mucous "show" which could be clear or blood streaked. You may find you pass urine often and may have mild diarrhoea. Your baby should be moving as usual - take time to concentrate on movements.

**What might I feel?** You may be unsure if labour has started or not, you may feel excited or restless.

You may find the contractions or cramps uncomfortable but you should be able to talk through them. You may wonder if you should be contacting your support people or LMC.

### What can I do to help?

Relax and stay calm. Carry on with usual daily routines. If it is nighttime, try to sleep. The best place for early labour is at home. Have positive support people with you. Drink water and eat light snacks. Move about or take warm showers or baths, use a hot water bottle or wheat bag to soothe the pain. Some people like gentle back massage also.

Contact your LMC if you have any questions or concerns, or if you have been advised to make contact at the first sign of labour.





## Active Labour(First stage)

**What is happening?** Your cervix is thinning and opening (from around 4cm to 9cm).

Your baby is moving deeper into your pelvis.

Your contractions are regular, stronger, and more painful. (They will be between 3 and 5 minutes apart and lasting from 50 to 60 seconds).

Your waters may break - it's important to note the time, colour of the fluid and how much comes out. If you need a pad, it is good to save these to show your midwife.

**What might I feel?** You may feel excited that labour has started. You may feel hot and shaky. You may be restless and uncomfortable.

You may need reassurance that you are okay and have people around to support you. Massage may be helpful or may be annoying.

## What can I do to help?

Warm water is great for relaxation; try a birth pool, bath or shower.

Walk around slowly and make rocking movements with your hips.

Upright positions tend to take the pain away from your back.

A Swiss ball is helpful if you want to sit and rest.

Breathe slowly through contractions and concentrate on one contraction at a time.

Music can be soothing so have some favourite tracks prepared.

Drink water or non-fizzy isotonic drinks. Ice cubes can be refreshing.

Massage and back rubs and hot or cold packs are often soothing. Encouragement and support will keep you focused and relaxed.

Go to the toilet regularly.

Use any relaxation technique you have practiced to help you rest deeply between contractions.

Contact your LMC to discuss when they will come to your home or when to come to the hospital or birthing unit.

Your LMC may ask to do a vaginal examination to confirm you are in active labour.

## Transition

**What is happening?** Your cervix is opening the last 1 to 2 cm to get to 10 cm. Your baby is now very deep in your pelvis and moving into your vagina (the birth canal). Contractions are stronger; they may last longer and have very little space between them. You may be shaking and have leg cramps. You may feel nauseous and may vomit. Your waters may break if they have not already done so.

**How might I feel?** You may feel restless and excited and want to move around or change positions. You may feel overwhelmed or fearful and have a strong urge to escape. Some women become irritable with their support people or midwife. You may be unable to rest between contractions and will need a lot of reassurance and support. You may feel like pushing.

**What can I do to help?** Transition is usually quite a quick stage so try not to panic and be reassured your baby is close. Take one contraction at a time, concentrate on your breathing and visualize your baby moving through your pelvis. Sometimes a new position will help. Your support people can help to keep you calm and reassure you.







## Pushing your baby out (second stage)

**What is happening?** Your cervix is now open creating a passage for your baby to move through your vagina.

The contractions will be less frequent but longer. Sometimes they even stop for a while before they change and start to push your baby down. It's your job to help push your baby into the world. This can take anything from 30 minutes to 2 hours. Your baby's head will gradually stretch your vagina and perineum and you may feel the baby moving down and

then back up as you relax between contractions. This is normal but little by little your baby will get closer to being born.

**How might I feel?** You will probably get a strong urge to push and a feeling of pressure in your bottom as if you need to do a poo. Pushing is hard work and you will feel tired and want to rest. You may feel excited that your baby will soon be in your arms.

**What can I do to help?** Find a position that is comfortable to push in. Trying different positions can be helpful. Upright is best but sometimes lying on your left side is good also. Your midwife will help you find helpful positions. Try not to tense up, listen to your body and work with it. Using a mirror to see your baby's head coming down can be very helpful.

## The birth of your baby

**What is happening?** You may feel stretching and burning as your baby's head stretches your perineum (the area between your anus and your vagina). Sometimes this area may tear to allow baby's head to birth and very rarely the midwife may need to make a small cut if there is a concern that baby needs to be born quickly. Once your baby's head is born the body usually comes quickly with the next contraction. The cord will be left attached for a few minutes and can then be cut by you, your partner or your midwife. There are no nerves in the cord so this does not hurt your baby at all!

**How might I feel?** You may feel relieved and exhausted.

You may be delighted and want to keep touching and staring at your new baby.

You may be dazed, overwhelmed and just not ready to welcome your baby yet.

You may fall instantly in love or it may take you a few weeks to feel that connection, all these feelings are absolutely normal.

**What can I do to help?** A warm compress on your perineum can help it stretch without tearing, and may help with the burning sensation. You can reach down and feel the top of your baby's head. Listen to your midwife you need to work together as your baby is born.





## The birth of your placenta/whenua (Third stage)

**What is happening?** After a short while mild contractions help your placenta peel off the inside of your uterus and there may be a small gush of blood. Your uterus will contract to slow the bleeding. The placenta moves into your vagina and can be pushed out by you or assisted out by your midwife gently pulling on the cord. This will depend on whether you need to have an injection to separate the placenta quickly or not. Your LMC will discuss this with you.

The placenta is usually out between 15 and 30 minutes after the birth, but can take up to an hour.

**How might I feel?** You may feel shaky and tired; some people feel nauseous and may vomit. You may be completely distracted by your new baby. The placenta is soft and slips out easily so you may get a feeling of heaviness in your vagina but it is not painful. You may feel relief when the placenta is finally out.

**What can I do to help?** Being upright lets gravity help bring your placenta down. Keep your baby skin to skin, or breastfeeding as this helps the placenta to separate. Having your baby skin to skin, especially in the first hour after birth, also helps your baby adjust to breathing, keeps him/ her warm and improves early breastfeeding. Think about whether you want to keep your placenta.

## Things to be concerned about

- If you have signs of labour before you are 37 weeks pregnant
- If you have constant pain that does not stop
- If you have any vaginal bleeding, other than a blood streaked show
- If you have a severe headache, blurred vision, or see flashing lights or blurry spots
- If your baby stops moving or the movements are less than usual
- If you have severe diarrhoea or vomiting
- If your waters break and the fluid is brown or greenish in colour, or smells really bad
- If your waters break before you are 37 weeks pregnant
- If your waters break but your labour does not start within a few hours

***Contact your LMC urgently if any of these occur***

## Telephone numbers

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