## Hints to Help You With Labour and Birth

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<th>What's Happening?</th>
<th>What Does it Feel Like (Physically)?</th>
<th>What You May Feel Like (Emotionally)</th>
<th>What Helps? (Partners Take Note!)</th>
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| **Early Labour** | - Irregular pattern of contractions every 5-20 mins last 20-40 secs.  
- May have “show”  
- May have frequent soft bowel movements  
- Bag of waters may break (only happens in early labour with 12% of women) | - May feel heaviness in lower abdomen like a period beginning  
- An achy back.  
- Contractions start in the back and move to the front. They will come like waves with a beginning, a peak and an end.  
- Breaks between contractions become shorter as the contractions become longer | - Contact your caregiver  
- Call your partner  
- At the beginning do activities that distract you (walking, watch TV, read, share jokes)  
- If at night, rest and sleep between contractions  
- As contractions lengthen do relaxing activities (massage, music, apply warm compresses to your neck, back, or lower uterus)  
- Change positions  
- Sit, lean on an exercise ball  
- Take sips of water frequently  
- Eat light meals  
- Empty your bladder every 1-2 hours  
- Use slow, deep breathing when you need to focus  
- Use TENS |

- Excited  
- Anxious  
- Restless  
- Unable to concentrate  
- Relieved it's started  
- Talkative or Quiet!
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| **Active Labour** | Labour progress is faster now as your cervix shortens completely and dilates to 7-8 cm. | • Contractions have a definite pattern  
• Contractions are longer (45-70 secs), stronger, and closer together (up to 4 in 10 minutes)  
• The baby moves down farther into the pelvis | • Quieter, more inward  
• A need to have your support person closer to you to help you stay focused during contractions  
• A need to “moan” using your voice with low deep sounds to soothe yourself | • Use slow deep breathing and light breathing as needed  
• Take contractions one at a time  
• Use a focal point  
• Music/massage and dim the lights  
• Change positions  
• Sway or rock your hips, use a ritual or routine with contractions  
• Bounce on exercise ball  
• Take sips of water  
• Relax in bath or shower  
• Use cold packs on lower back  
• Relax/catnap between contractions  
• Continue to use TENS |
| **Transition** | Usually the shortest and the most intense part of labour as your cervix completes dilatation. | • Four to five contractions in ten minutes with each contraction lasting 60-90 secs.  
• The bag of waters often break during this phase  
• The baby continues to move down – putting pressure on your rectal area | • May express strange feelings: fear, panic, anger or be come very quiet and inward  
• May feel overwhelmed and need to cry | • Remember that this is the shortest part of labour and your baby will be here soon  
• Continue your routines that are helping  
• Add your panting breath with the urges to push  
• Have cool cloths placed on your forehead or neck  
• Need more help with focusing  
• If legs are shaky, massage may help |
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| Birth                | Constrictions may slow for a brief time.  
• Three contractions come in 10 minutes lasting 60 seconds approx.  
• Baby’s head turns to find the best fit through the pelvis.  
• The perineum stretches as the baby’s head comes through the vaginal opening | A “rest and be thankful” break at the beginning of pushing  
• May need to push 3 to 5 times with each contraction  
• Feel very hot/flushed  
• It is normal to pass a small amount of stool as you begin to push  
• Crowning of baby’s head causes a stretching, tingling, burning sensation. These tissues then go numb as they continue to stretch  
• Great relief with birth of baby’s head | May feel very tired or motivated, energized (home stretch)  
• Working hard  
• More involved and aware of surroundings |
|                      | Remember that your uterus does 80% of the work (largest muscle in your body!)  
• Push when you have the urge – use **pushing breathing**  
• Touch your baby’s head and look in the mirror to help your pushing  
• Think of pushing your baby down, forward and out into the light  
• Choose positions like squatting that open the pelvic outlet and encourage gravity (your caregivers will help you)  
• Help your perineum to relax with warm compresses |

**Questions for my care provider...**

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