

# Early Labour Support

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*Information for Parents*

Labour is hard work and usually takes many hours from the first signs of it starting up until your baby is born. The following information will hopefully help you to prepare yourself as well as cope with labour once it begins.

## What happens to the body in labour?

The tightenings experienced during the last few weeks of pregnancy help to soften the neck of your womb or cervix. As labour becomes established, tightenings become stronger, last longer and become contractions. These continue to help the neck of your womb to soften as well as shorten and begin to open or dilate. They also help your baby get into position for the birth. Once the contractions become regular (at least 1 every 5 minutes), painful and last about a minute each labour has usually started.

## Preparation before labour begins

Many women fear the 'pain' of labour more than anything else. If you take a few moments to think about why it hurts to have a baby, you may feel more relaxed about it. Imagine if you had no warning that your baby was about to be born - think of how frightening that would be!

Friends and relatives will tell you how painful birth is, but your experience depends on many factors. Contraction pains during labour are a sign that your body is using its power to bring your baby into the world. This does not mean that labour pain doesn't hurt. It can be very painful, particularly with the peak of each contraction, which is when your body is working the hardest and making the most progress.

If you fear the pain, you will automatically tense your muscles with each contraction and by doing this you will use up valuable energy that your womb needs.

When the contractions become more painful even closing your eyes and relaxing between contractions can be very helpful.

### \* **Visualise**

It can help if you try to imagine what is happening to your body and your baby when you are in labour. Think about the neck of your womb opening with each contraction and your baby moving down the birth canal. Also, find a nice picture or holiday photo and when you have a contraction concentrate on the picture. Some women find this helps.

### \* **Massage**

Massage can help lower back pain. Firm massage with the heel of the hand can be a wonderful help. Sometimes you may need to be held or gently stroked.

### \* **What should I do next?**

It is normal for either your contractions to go off or continue to become longer and stronger. If you want to, take two Paracetamol (but not on an empty stomach).

## When should I ring hospital?

Well-done if you manage to cope at home for as long as you can.

Ring when you are finding it difficult to talk through your contractions. These should be five minutes apart or ideally closer together, particularly if this is your first baby.



If you are worried at any time don't hesitate to ring us.

**Delivery Suite: 0121 472 3032**

**Birth Centre: 0121 623 6907**

## What can I do to help myself? Cont/d...

Occasionally aches and pains in certain places during labour will tell you that you need to change position to allow your baby to move, or that you need to empty your bladder. It might be walking up & down stairs, swaying your hips, or kneeling over a pile of pillows to take the weight off your back. Remember gravity - being upright helps.

### \* **Build-up your energy levels**

Eat when you can, whatever you fancy. Try eating little hourly snacks and sip drinks often.

### \* **Warm bath or shower**

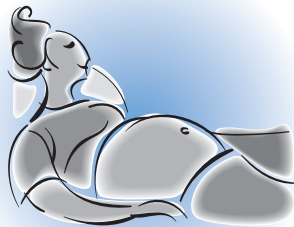
Warm water (around body temperature) helps a great deal even if you don't fancy a bath give it a try. If it is uncomfortable lying in the bath, try lying on your side or kneeling forward. Stay in the bath as long as you feel comfortable to be there or try a shower instead.

Have another bath later if you feel like it.  
Water might help you to relax.

### \* **Relax**

This is the most important thing you can do for yourself in labour particularly in the early stages. Relaxation does not just mean relaxed muscles-it also means having a calm mind and feeling confident that birth is a natural process and that your body is strong enough to cope.

It is quite normal for the contractions to start to become more painful and frequent and then go off again. This is nature's way of giving you the opportunity to rest - take advantage of these opportunities.



## Preparation before labour begins cont/d...

This can make labour more painful and exhausting. If however, you try to remain as relaxed and calm as you can, and you work with your body, you will not only cope much better, but you will feel a sense of real achievement and triumph.

## Choose a good supporter

Many women choose their partner, others choose their mother, sister or friend. Choose someone, who will give you encouragement, is confident to support you and is relaxed about his or her role as supportive companion. In order for your birth partner to support you to the best of their ability, it is important for them to take regular refreshment breaks.

## Consider hiring a TNS (Transcutaneous Electrical Nerve Stimulation)

TENS is a natural way of encouraging your body to produce its own painkillers, called endorphins, it also interrupts the pain pathways from your womb to your brain. It usually takes around 40 minutes to start working.

There are no side effects for you or baby, and it can be applied and removed easily at your request. It has a small control box which connects to four pads that are positioned either side of your spine.

TENS produces a tingling, pulsating sensation on your back. You control the pattern of stimulation and can choose to have either a continuous pulsation or an intermittent one. TENS is best in early labour and it has the added benefit - you can move around. You can hire TENS machines for use at home in early labour before coming into hospital. We do have TENS machines available for hire. Please ask if you would like to try it.

## Why not try the birth ball?

The Birth Ball is excellent for comfort during pregnancy, labour, birth and for after delivery. If you buy your own, make sure that it is suitable for pregnancy and that you follow the manufacturers guidelines. We advise you to ONLY use the birth ball provided by the hospital for labour. They are strong, specifically made for labour and are maintained according to the manufacturers recommendations.

### Benefits of Using the Birth Ball during Pregnancy

- \* Using the birth ball during pregnancy can strengthen your lower back and abdominal muscles while decreasing lower back pain.
- \* Rocking and swaying on the birth ball can help open your pelvis to make room for your baby to turn and get into a good position for birth. This also helps with backache.

### Using the Birth Ball for labour can help you to relax

- \* Pelvic Rocking can help your baby get into a good position and make you feel more comfortable during early and advanced labour. To try this;
  - get into the hands and knees position (kneel on something soft)
  - position the ball in front of you
  - Lean forward, hugging the ball, positioning it above your breasts, moving it towards and away from you until you are comfortable
  - Slowly and rhythmically tuck your tail bone under and then relax
  - Swaying your hips helps make room for your baby to turn when it needs to whilst taking pressure off your back and helping you to relax.

## Where should I be in labour?

Home is much more comfortable than hospital and is the best place for you to be for as long as you can manage. Do ring and check with us if you have had some complications in your pregnancy or a caesarean section before.



Although you hear stories about babies born on the way to hospital, there are more women who say that they wish they had spent more of their early labour in the comfort and privacy of their own home.

However, if you had a complicated pregnancy, please phone the hospital for advice as to how long you should remain at home.

## What can I do to help myself?

Here are a few suggestions. They are in no particular order. See how you feel and try all or some of the ideas. Remember to concentrate on slow steady breathing when you have a contraction.



- \* **Stay upright & move around**  
Think about what you do to relieve discomfort normally, for example, hot water bottles, changing positions, turning the lights down low, listening to music, rocking your pelvis etc. Most importantly, listen to your body and tune in to what you need to do.