

PHILOMENA BIRTH

STAGES OF LABOR



Throughout labor, the body undergoes various stages, each presenting distinct characteristics and challenges.



Doula Support &
Childbirth Education



EARLY LABOR: Laboring at Home & Going to the Hospital

Key Points

- **Cervix Dilation:** During early labor, the cervix gradually opens and thins out, reaching approximately 0–6 centimeters.
- **Contractions:** Contractions in early labor are typically mild and not as intense as those in active labor. They may feel like menstrual cramps. Contractions can occur anywhere from 5 to 20 minutes apart during early labor, with irregular intervals.
- **Longest Phase:** Early labor is often the longest phase of labor, especially for first-time moms. It can last for several hours or even days.

When to Go to the Hospital: The 5-1-1 Rule

- **Contractions:** When your contractions are regular, coming every 5 minutes or less.
- **Duration:** Each contraction should last around 1 minute or longer.
- **Consistency:** This pattern should continue for at least 1 hour.

Remember contractions need to be strong to be making cervical changes. The most important indicator of your current phase of labor is the strength of the contractions. Can you talk through them? Are they taking your breath away? If they are mild but close together, it's still early labor!

Laboring at Home: Tips for Comfort

- **Rest:** Early labor can be a long process, so it's essential to rest when you can. Take short naps or lie down in a comfortable position to preserve your energy. If labor starts in the middle of the night, try to go back to sleep!
- **Distractions:** Engage in activities that distract you. Listen to soothing music, call a loved one, or watch a movie to take your mind off the contractions.
- **Movement:** Movement is key for labor! Gentle movement can help progress labor and ease discomfort. Go for a walk (try curb walking), sit or lean over a birth ball, follow your instincts, and find movements that work for you.
- **Hydration + Snacking:** Staying hydrated is essential during labor. Drink water or electrolyte-rich drinks to keep your energy levels up. Nourish your body with small, easily digestible snacks. Opt for light foods like fruits, yogurt, and nuts, or small protein-filled meals like scrambled eggs and toast.
- **Mindset:** Early labor is often long. Trust your body, and be patient. Listen to birth affirmations to keep you in a positive mindset.

Note: Every labor experience is unique, and the information provided here is intended as a general guideline. Always follow the advice of your healthcare provider, and discuss your birth plan and preferences with them.

ACTIVE LABOR: Transform Your Hospital Room & Manage Contractions

Key Points

- **Cervix Dilation:** The cervix dilates from 6 to 8 centimeters.
- **Contractions:** During this stage, contractions become stronger and more intense. They typically occur at a frequency of 3 to 5 minutes apart and last for about 1 minute.
- **Labor Land:** Labor land refers to a state of altered consciousness experienced during active labor, characterized by intense focus and dissociation from the external world, often facilitated by the body's natural release of pain-relieving hormones like endorphins. It allows women to cope with the intensity of childbirth and may lead to feelings of empowerment, detachment from pain, and inner experiences.

Transform Your Hospital Room Into a Birthing Sanctuary

- **Lighting:** Turn off the bright hospital lights! Bring LED candles and twinkle lights with you. Dim lighting can help labor progress by creating a calming environment that reduces stress and promotes the release of oxytocin, which enhances contractions.
- **Clothing:** Wear your own clothing! Buy a labor gown that feels cozy and beautiful.
- **Music:** Create at least two playlists to listen to during labor: one calming playlist and one upbeat playlist.
- **Atmosphere:** Bring any "special items" you want with you. Examples include pictures of loved ones, pictures of pets, religious items, or anything that brings you comfort.

How to Manage Contractions

- **Movement + Position Changes:** Experiment with different positions, such as walking, swaying, or changing from standing to kneeling. Movement can help ease discomfort and encourage progress.
- **Breathing Techniques:** Focus on slow, deep breathing during contractions to help relax your body and manage the pain. Controlled breathing can alleviate tension and make contractions more bearable.
- **Counter-Pressure:** Apply pressure to the lower back or hips during contractions to alleviate some of the pain. A partner or support person can help with this technique.
- **Heat:** Warm compresses, heat packs, or heating pads to the lower abdomen or lower back can provide soothing relief and relaxation.
- **Cold:** Cold wash clothes or ice packs on the forehead, back of the neck, or lower back can provide pain relief.
- **Visualization + Positive Affirmations:** Positive affirmations can also help to reduce anxiety and increase confidence.
- **Hydrotherapy:** Taking a warm shower or bath can help relax the body ease the intensity of contractions.
- **Continuous Support:** Having a supportive birthing partner and/or doula can make a significant difference during active labor. Emotional support and encouragement are essential for managing contractions effectively.
- **Medication Options:** If desired, discuss pain relief options with your healthcare provider. These may include epidurals, analgesics, or other pain management techniques. Remember to consider the potential risks and benefits of each option.

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TRANSITION: How Partners Can Provide Amazing Support

Key Points

- **Cervix Dilation:** The cervix dilates from 8 to 10 centimeters.
- **Contractions:** During this stage, contractions are the most intense, lasting about 60-90 seconds and occurring every 2-3 minutes. This is the most intense phase but also the shortest phase of labor.
- **Labor Shakes:** Shaking during labor is a common physiological response caused by hormonal changes and the release of adrenaline.
- **Nausea:** Nausea during transition can result from a combination of hormonal changes.
- **Hot + Cold Flashes:** Hot and cold flashes can intermittently occur due to hormonal shifts.
- **Pressure:** You'll likely experience increased pressure in the pelvis and rectum as the baby descends further into the birth canal.

Good Support During Transition

- **Stay Attentive, Calm + Reassuring:** Reassure the birthing person that they are strong and capable. Offer your undivided attention to create a sense of security.
- **Normalize the Experience:** Let them know that the transition is intense but a sign of progress. Remind them that they are getting closer to meeting their baby. Remind them to take it one contraction at a time.
- **Physical Comfort:** Provide gentle touch, back rubs, or counter-pressure on the lower back. Ice-cold wash cloths on the forehead or back of the neck can be a powerful tool.
- **Empower Their Choices:** Offer options for positions and movements. Allow them to make decisions that align with their preferences. Be their cheerleader and advocate, reminding them of their strength.
- **Hydration + Nutrition:** Offer sips of water or clear fluids to stay hydrated. Provide light snacks if desired.
- **Instincts + Intuition:** Encourage them to listen to their body and trust their instincts throughout the process.

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Breathing Techniques for Labor:

Breathing is a powerful tool to help you manage the intensity of labor and create a positive birthing experience. Trust your body, and stay connected to your breath throughout the process. Remember that each labor is unique, and finding what works best for you is essential.

Deep Breathing:

Inhale slowly and deeply through your nose. Exhale slowly and fully through your mouth. Focus on making each breath long and even, helping you stay relaxed and calm.

Golden Thread Breath:

Imagine a golden thread extending from your nose. Inhale through your nose, picturing the golden thread pulling in the breath. Exhale slowly through your nose, envisioning the golden thread unraveling.

5-Count Breathing:

Inhale for a count of 5, hold for a count of 5, and exhale for a count of 5. This technique helps regulate your breathing and keeps you focused.

Horse Lips Breathing:

Part your lips slightly and blow out air in short bursts, imitating a horse's whinny. This technique helps release tension in your jaw and face.

Rhythmic Breathing:

Establish a consistent rhythm for your breaths. For example, inhale for a count of 4 and exhale for a count of 4. Concentrate on maintaining the same rhythm throughout each contraction.

Slow-Paced Breathing:

Breathe slowly to conserve energy and relax your body. Inhale deeply for a count of 4-6, then exhale slowly for the same count. This technique is particularly useful during early labor or in between contractions.

Visualization Breathing:

Picture a calm and peaceful place in your mind. As you inhale, imagine yourself absorbing the serenity of that place. As you exhale, release any tension or discomfort.



Remember: Practice these breathing techniques during pregnancy to become familiar with them. Use the techniques that feel most comfortable and effective for you during labor. Have your birth partner remind you to breathe and offer support during labor.