

KEEP CALM AND LABOR ON!



Know what to expect in early labor.

OH BABY! YOU JUST HAD YOUR FIRST CONTRACTION. IS THIS IT? SHOULD YOU GRAB YOUR BIRTHING BAG AND HEAD OUT?

You may be in **early labor** — the phase that comes before **active labor**.

WHAT'S EARLY LABOR LIKE?

- Contractions are getting stronger and settling into a regular pattern
- As contractions strengthen, you'll need to work harder and find a rhythm
- The cervix dilates to 6 cm to prepare for birth, as the baby moves down in your pelvis¹
- Early labor is most often the longest phase, more than half of the total labor time

DID YOU KNOW?



The average length of early labor is **6-12 hours** for first-time parents (early labor is usually shorter for experienced moms).²

It may even last **24 hours or more**, which can be perfectly normal

THERE ARE BENEFITS TO STAYING HOME DURING LABOR AS LONG AS POSSIBLE:



Gives you more **flexibility** to move freely—which can **reduce** the risk of medical interventions³



Helps **increase** the labor hormone, oxytocin—which **allows** the cervix to thin and open⁴

HOW CAN YOUR PARTNER AND DOULA SUPPORT YOU?



Offering comfort, physical care and reassurance



Helping time contractions



Keeping your mind off labor with simple activities, like playing games

STAY CONNECTED

Resting and relaxing

Drinking plenty of fluids and eating what appeals to you

Going for a short walk

Moving around or changing positions

Focusing on slow, deep breathing

Using a warm pad or ice pack on your lower back

Reading a good book or watching TV

Asking your doula or partner for a gentle massage



HOW DO I KNOW WHEN TO GO?

Active labor begins when contractions are roughly 3-5 minutes apart, last 1 minute and have been that way for 1-2 hours.⁶

However, listen to your body. If you feel it's time to go to your birthing facility, follow that instinct and/or call your care provider first, especially if your water breaks.

LEARN MORE ABOUT EARLY LABOR IN A LAMAZE CLASS, IN-PERSON OR ONLINE, SO YOU CAN BE PREPARED! VISIT LAMAZE.ORG TO LEARN MORE.



1 American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine. Safe prevention of the primary cesarean delivery. Obstetric Care Consensus No. 1. American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists.

American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology (2014): 123:693-711. doi: 10.1097/01.AOG.0000444441.04111.1d

2 Mayo Clinic. (2013, July 18). Labor and delivery, postpartum care - Stages of labor: Baby, it's time! Retrieved from <http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/labor-and-delivery/in-depth/stages-of-labor/art-20046545>

3 Regan, M., McElroy, K., lobst, S., and Lothian, J. (2015). Optimizing childbirth outcomes through adoption of healthy birth practices.

4 Childbirth Connection. (April 2011). Understanding & Navigating the Maternity Care System. Retrieved from <http://www.childbirthconnection.org/maternity-care/role-of-hormones/>

5 March of Dimes. (May 2014). Vaginal birth - Stages of labor. Retrieved from <http://www.marchofdimes.org/pregnancy/stages-of-labor.aspx>

6 Lothian, J.A., McGrath, K. (2012, April 24). Your step-by-step guide to giving birth. [Web log post]. Retrieved from <http://www.lamaze.org/StagesOfLabor>