

Early Labour (Stage One)

Symptoms: mild contractions (often described as feeling like period/menstrual cramps), backache and mild diarrhoea, she may have a burst of energy and decide to clean the house. She may have bloody show. Her membranes might leak or rupture (can happen anytime during labour).

Emotionally she may be happy, excited and relieved that labour has begun, but she may also feel nervous and experience some apprehension – ‘Am I really ready for this?’.

Ideal Positions: If daytime upright and walking about during contractions, resting between them. If night time – sleep, sleep and try to sleep!

What You Can Do:

- ~ Encouragement is vital during each stage of labour.
- ~ Encourage mom-to-be to rest for as long as possible, to sleep if it is night time.
- ~ In the day time encourage her to change positions often, help her find comfortable positions
- ~ Make sure she stays well hydrated and eats well.
- ~ Give her reassurance, tell her that she’s doing really well
- ~ Keep her company – walk with her, watch television, play a board game etc
- ~ Time some contractions, keeping a record
- ~ Help her to relax
- ~ Offer a massage
- ~ If you have planned to use a birth attendant (Doula), call them as he/she has requested
- ~ Pack yourself something to eat and some snacks (hospital birth)

****KEEP HER MIND OCCUPIED SO THAT SHE CAN IGNORE THINGS AS LONG AS POSSIBLE.****

Active Labour (Stage One)

Symptoms: Contractions will become stronger, longer , 45 – 60 seconds, two to four minutes apart. She may feel increased pressure in her back.

Emotionally: You may notice your partner displays increased concentration and seriousness. She may start to feel uncertain she can do it and feel apprehensive. She may particularly want your company/support during this time.

Ideal Positions: upright and walking about or kneeling during contractions, resting between them. Rocking in a chair, on all fours rocking back and forth, sitting on a birth ball, anything that promotes the baby to move down into the pelvis.

What You Can Do: Remember – S.U.P.P.O.R.T.:

- S – Supportive environment
- U – Urinate at least once an hour
- P – Position changes often
- P – Praise and Encouragement
- O – Out of bed (walk/shower)
- R – Relaxation
- T – Touch and Massage

Other things you might like to try include:

- ~ Eliminate distractions in the environment (pillows, lighting and music)
- ~ Keep her lips and mouth moist , ~ Keep telling her how well she is doing

Transition (Stage One)

Symptoms: During transition, your encouragement and strength is particularly important to help get through these very intense contractions. It can also be a difficult stage for you, her partner, seeing her in pain and not being able to help take the pain away.

Emotionally, your partner may be irritable and may want to give up or go home. She may feel that she just wants it all to be over with, this is the time she may ask for drugs even if she originally said she did not want them – so help her focus as much as you can. She may lose it completely and it is up to you to keep her calm and get her through it.

She may experience:

- ~ Very intense contractions
- ~ Nausea and / or vomiting
- ~ Snoozing between contractions
- ~ Hot flashes
- ~ Chills and legs shaking
- ~ Severe low backache
- ~ Possibly urge to push
- ~ Pressure in the rectum as baby descends

Ideal Positions: upright and walking about or kneeling during contractions, resting between them. Rocking in a chair, on all fours rocking back and forth, sitting on a birth ball, anything that promotes the baby to move down into the pelvis. **WHATEVER FEELS MOST COMFORTABLE FOR MOM !**

What You Can Do:

- ~ Lots of encouragement and positive thoughts!
- ~ Encourage her to use vocalization
- ~ Try visualisation
- ~ Tell her how great she is doing and that baby will arrive very soon
- ~ Tell her that you love her
- ~ Remind her that this is the shortest stage of labour
- ~ Remind her to take one contraction at a time
- ~ Squeeze her hand or give her something to squeeze
- ~ Breathe with her
- ~ Apply counterpressure
- ~ Hold her or give her a big hug
- ~ Fan her if she is hot
- ~ Put a cool face washer on her forehead or neck if she is hot or nauseous
- ~ Get extra blankets and massage her legs if she has chills
- ~ Keep her lips and mouth moist
- ~ Help her to relax between contractions
- ~ If she starts to lose it then remember the take charge routine.

Stage Two – The birth of your baby

Symptoms: She may have a possible quiet spell of up to 20 minutes as her body rests in preparation for pushing. The contractions may slow down and change character.

Emotionally: She may feel feeling of elation and power or discouragement.

She may experience:

- ~ An almost uncontrollable urge to push
- ~ Tremendous back and rectal pressure (may feel that she needs to go to the toilet)
- ~ Second wind' of strength to make pushing effort
- ~ Pins and needles / burning / stretching sensation as baby crowns (Ring of Fire)
- ~ Exhaustion between contractions
- ~ Relief that she can actively bring about the birth of her baby
- ~ Ecstatic sensation as the baby is born

Ideal Positions: During the second stage, positions which best help the progression of labour are standing or kneeling with the upper body leaning forward during contractions. Towards the end of the second stage, supported squatting provides the greatest increase of pressure in the pelvic cavity and seems to be the most effective position during contractions. If the second stage is very quick, kneeling on all fours may be preferred. If she is having troubles pushing then sitting on the toilet can sometimes help really open things up and direct the pushing in the right way.

What You Can Do

- ~ Help her to find the most comfortable and productive position – assisted squatting or kneeling is a great position ~ for delivery as it helps relax the perineum (less susceptible to tear compared to lying down)
- ~ Whisper words of quiet encouragement “You’re doing a great job”
- ~ Encourage her to rest between contractions
- ~ If she holds her breath while pushing, remind her to breathe every 6-10 seconds
- ~ Remind her to relax her perineum
- ~ Remind her to keep her eyes open for the birth
- ~ Get a mirror so she can see the baby being born if that is what she wants

Stage Three - Delivery of the Placenta

The final phase of labour is the delivery of the placenta. The placenta detaches from the uterus in around 5-20 minutes.

Symptoms: Apart from the joy of birthing her child and relief that the labour is almost over, mom may now feel mild contractions and fatigue and she prepares to deliver the placenta. She may also have a burst of energy from the adrenalin rush of just having given birth.

What You Can Do: Help her to hold or cuddle the baby.

Encouragement in Labour

During labour, one of the most powerful tools of the labour support person is the ability to ensure the mother that she is doing well, and to encourage her to continue what she is already doing.

You may not believe it, but many a labouring mother has been helped by three little words, "You're doing great!" It sounds too simple to be true, but it is. During active labour, the mother may not realize how far she has come. She is literally taking her labour one contraction at a time, and unlike those supporting her, she may not see it as one contraction closer to the birth. She may not even recognize that she has a significant portion of her labour behind her.

That is one of the reasons a labour support person is so important. The labour support person becomes the mother's "eyes and ears," watching what is happening and letting the mother know where she is. Comments such as "I can't do this!" can be calmed by responses such as, "but you've been doing this for an hour, and you're doing great." Suddenly, the mother will have a newfound confidence to continue.

Transition is a time of confusion for a mother. She cannot get comfortable, she doesn't seem to know what to do, and she may not even remember that she is in labour for a baby. It is at this point that the reassuring words of her labour support person can help a woman most. She will need to be reminded how close she is to pushing, and to holding her baby. She will also need to be reminded what to do. She may not remember for more than a few seconds, so repeat yourself without getting frustrated. Looks of panic on the mother can be responded to with, "I'm right here, we're almost done. Lay still and let the contraction go away."

What are the magic words of encouragement that will help the mother? That will depend on who she is, and what your relationship is to her. In some instances, "I love you" will be very reassuring. In other cases, "You're doing perfect, it's beautiful to watch you." will reassure her. As labour support person, you should know the mother well enough to know what would relax and reassure her.

You may also try repeating an encouraging phrase several times. Lines such as the following said to the mother during a contraction can give her something to focus on, while reassuring her that what is happening is normal.

- The baby is moving down; the baby will be here soon.
- The baby is trying to come out. You are helping her come out.
- The stronger it feels, the better it works.
- You are doing so well, I'm so proud of you.
- Your body is working perfectly. Everything is working perfectly.
- The nurse said you were doing great. You ARE doing great.