

The Stages of Labour Explained

PREGNANCY TIPS AND ARTICLES

ARTICLE

DEC 23, 2021

Get a detailed plan and more information about the birthing process to best prepare yourself to manage potential physical pain and emotion during the different stages of childbirth.

Going through the birthing process for the first time has a lot of uncertainties. We have broken down the stages of labour to help you feel more informed about the process.

As you reach the end of your 40th week of pregnancy, chances are you'll be feeling more than ready to give birth to your baby! You'll be excited for the new phase of your life that is about to start with your new baby. So how do you know when it's time to kick start your birth plan and grab the hospital bag you've packed and repacked a hundred times?

Pre-Labour or Lightening

This stage can last anywhere from a few days to a few weeks. During this stage, the foetus lowers towards the cervix putting pressure on your bladder. You will experience contractions during the lightening phase. However, the contractions will be irregular at this point.

Early Stage of Labour

You can recognize this stage by a change in your contractions. Instead of being intermittent, they will occur at increasing intervals and last for 30 to 60 seconds. If regular contractions persist for more than an hour, you are probably in labour.

Some other things you will experience at the early stage of labour is the opening of the cervix and the rupturing of amniotic membrane, often referred to "water breaking" - this is the point where you need to make a move towards the hospital, as

well as calling your doctor to let them know you're in labour.

Once you reach the hospital, a doctor will collect information about your contractions, your recent bowel movements, and if your membrane has broken. You will also be examined to determine the foetus' position, heartbeat as well as your blood pressure, pulse, temperature and size of your cervical opening.

In the transitional stage, the contractions will take on a regular pattern and get progressively stronger. The cycle of contractions works to soften the cervix and your doctor will check to see that your cervix is dilating appropriately.

This cycle averages 12-14 hours for your first child and then 7 hours for your second child and onwards.

Transitional Stage

The transitional stage occurs as your cervix is nearly fully dilated which means that it has opened to about 10 cm. Many mothers find the last part of the transitional phase to be the most difficult in terms of pain management. Make sure you have a plan in place beforehand so your doctor knows how you want to proceed in terms of taking painkillers.

Second stage of labour

Finally! This is the stage you've been waiting for when your child will be born. Once your cervix is fully dilated to 10 cm, you are ready to start pushing. For some women this sensation comes naturally but if not, your doctor will be there the entire time to guide you through the process.

With your first child the second stage of labour can last upwards of an hour.

During this stage, your doctor will be monitoring your baby's position. If you are experiencing difficulty pushing or your baby has moved into a different position, they may opt for an Instrumental Delivery.

This can involve the use of forceps or a ventouse to help push your child out. In either case, it may require an episiotomy (where the perineum is anesthetized and cut) but this is repaired immediately after the birth.

The baby will emerge head first in 19 out of 20 births. Once the full top of the head has appeared, the baby is nearly born. Once the baby has crowned, your doctor will ensure that the umbilical cord is away from the baby's neck. Once this is verified, the baby's head will be turned from side to side and the baby will emerge one shoulder at a time.

Congratulations! Your baby has just entered the world!

Third Stage of Labour

I know what you're thinking, there's yet another stage after I've given birth?

Don't worry, this is a short one! The third stage is when the new mother delivers the placenta, also known as afterbirth. During this process, you'll still have contractions, however, they will be much easier than the ones during the birthing process. This stage can be sped up through the injection of the hormone syntometrine that you receive intravenously while your child is being delivered.

Some tips to help your through labour

The concept of a birthing plan has become very popular over recent years, but every mum-to-be has to remember that there is a chance things might not as planned. Many women want to have a completely natural birth, but it's important to remember that ultimately, the most important thing is the safety of you and your new baby.

To help ensure you are getting all the right nutrients through your pregnancy, read more about Wyeth's nutrient supplement S-26 MAMA which helps pregnant mums achieve their nutrient requirements and supports appropriate weight gain.

References:

1. MayoClinic:
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2. American Academy of Pediatrics:
<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/prenatal/Pages/Preparing-for-Delivery.aspx>



