

Happy Birthday!

You are aware that “things” are starting to happen. If you look after yourself well during the pre-early labour stage you are less likely to run out of steam in established labour.

Latent or pre-labour to early labour

During this stage your cervix is thinning out (effacing) rather than dilating. Sometimes, especially for first births, this stage can last for 24-48 hours (sometimes called “latent” labour).

Signs of this stage:

- ♥ Irregular contractions, lasting less than 1 minute
- ♥ These can be experienced as mild through to quite sharp/painful
- ♥ A bloody show/diarrhoea/backache/period cramps

What to do?

The best strategy here is to preserve your resources for as long as possible:

- ♥ Ignore/underestimate what is going on – you **will know** when labour establishes!
- ♥ Sleep/doze as long as possible
- ♥ Panadol/warm drinks/warm bath/massage/cuddles/candles/wheatpacks - all help
- ♥ Become like a cat and snooze – it is very important to keep lots of energy in reserve as it is likely you will not sleep much for the next few days
- ♥ Sip on water frequently (not power drinks)
- ♥ Eat food to give you sustained energy – fresh/tinned fruits in juice, soup & toast, nuts/dried fruit, rice/baked potatoes
- ♥ Avoid fatty & sugary food - biscuits/muesli bars/chocolates/sweets

You will reach a time in early labour where you will want to be: walking, rocking, kneeling, dancing, visualising... **this is the time where you will have to find your own way of being with your labour pains.** The dozing off/resting between contractions is a fantastic “power rest” strategy.

- ♥ Rally your support crew
- ♥ Surrender to your labour – your baby is on the way!

Established Labour

This is the stage when your baby's head is descending even lower into your pelvis and your cervix is dilating more steadily.

Signs of established labour

- ♥ Regular very strong contractions @ 3 minutes apart lasting 50-90 seconds
- ♥ Your waters may or may not have broken
- ♥ These contractions will have a different quality to early labour - they will be much more intense
- ♥ You will be concentrating on breathing through contractions
- ♥ You will not be able to talk during them

What to do?

- ♥ Rocking/walking/kneeling/leaning
- ♥ Long showers or bath/pool
- ♥ Quietness during contractions
- ♥ Support person talking you through each contraction
- ♥ Peaceful, safe environment
- ♥ Support people feeding, watering, loving, nurturing you
- ♥ See the Labour Checklist for when to call your midwife

You need to sip away at least 500ml water an hour during this stage & snack on small bites of food every half hour. If you are vomiting – suck ice chips, ice blocks (ask your midwife about other methods of rehydrating).

Your support crew can love, nurture and support you but essentially it is you yourself that takes responsibility for being with the pain. Great preparation, good antenatal classes & regular exercise through your pregnancy to increase your stamina, along with excellent nutrition, will help you immensely.

Please see the "Labour Checklist" for easy to follow instructions when to call your midwife once you are in established labour.

Please call your midwife immediately if

- ♥ Your waters are brown or green (meconium)
- ♥ You are bleeding bright red blood