

Managing Early Labour at Home

Before Labour Begins

What is happening

You may notice one or more of the following signs:

- Braxton Hicks contractions (mild pre-labour tightenings) may increase but tend to stay at about the same length, strength and frequency.
- Increased vaginal discharge.
- Your baby's movements should not change. Continue with your fetal movement count sheet if your doctor has requested you keep one.
- Increasing backache and restlessness.
- Several soft bowel movements.

These signs may occur days before the start of labour.

Start of Labour

What is happening

As your labour becomes more active you may notice one or more of the following signs:

- Contractions which are becoming longer, stronger and closer together.
- "Show" (vaginal discharge of thick mucous with pink or red tinge).
- Rupture of membranes may occur at any time.
- Loose bowel movements may continue.
- You may feel excited and relieved that labour has begun and yet a bit nervous.

Helping yourself in Labour

- Try to keep your mind active and do not become preoccupied with labour.
- Continue to notice your baby's movements.
- Count the number of contractions in 15 minutes once every hour.
- Continue your usual activity as long as possible.
- Eat easily digested foods- mostly carbohydrates (toast, cereals, pasta). Avoid fatty foods.
- Drink generous amounts of fluid.
- Go for a walk, listen to music, use your relaxation skills.
- Have a warm bath if your membranes (bag of water) have not broken. If your membranes have broken, you may shower if you wish.

Suggestions for the support person

- Time the contractions. If there is no difference in how long the contractions are, how strong they are and how close together they are, stop timing the contractions and start again later when there is a change.
- Encourage them to rest. It is important for you to stay rested as well.
- Encourage them to use relaxation skills, and stay relaxed yourself. Some people in labour find a walk is a good way to pass the time.
- Encourage them to eat light meals or snacks, and make sure you eat something yourself.

As Labour Progresses

What is happening

- Cervix is stretching and beginning to dilate (open).
- Contractions may become strong enough that you feel you cannot walk or talk through them.
- Contractions become closer together.

Helping yourself

- As a contraction begins, take a deep cleansing breath and relax.
- Continue slow deep breathing through the contraction.
- Between contractions rest, watch television, listen to music, play games, etc.
- Upright positions, walking, swaying, squatting and changing your position often will help the baby move down.
- For backache, try kneeling “on all fours” and rocking your pelvis through the contractions. Back rubs may help.
- Try other relaxation techniques such as focusing on something, imagery or rocking.
- Continue to count the number of contractions in 15 minutes once every hour.
- Drink generous amounts of clear fluid.

Suggestions for the support person

- Encourage them to use relaxation techniques.
- Remind them to breathe with the contractions.
- Encourage them to change positions frequently.
- Provide relaxing strokes or massage. Be sure that you are in safe and comfortable positions to lessen your own fatigue.
- Make eye contact with them.
- Remind them to empty their bladder every 1-2 hours.
- Encourage them to drink clear fluids. Keep your own energy up with fluids and snacks.

Come to the hospital if you have any of the following:

- Your contractions are getting stronger, longer and closer together and you are no longer comfortable at home, or are not able to talk through a contraction.
- There is a decrease in your baby’s movements.
- Bright red bleeding occurs.
- You feel rectal pressure.
- Your membranes (bag of waters) break.

After you and your baby have been assessed, you may be encouraged to return home.

Please call Health Link Alberta (811) with any questions or concerns

- Call 811 to speak with a registered nurse 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

This material is designed for information purposes only. It should not be used in place of medical advice, instruction and/or treatment. If you have specific questions, please consult your doctor or appropriate health care professional. Updated 2021.