

# Any Day Now

## *Your guide to early labor at home*

**Congratulations; you're in early labor!** This is an early stage of labor that helps prepare your body for active labor—the phase when you finally meet your baby.

About two-thirds of your entire labor (about 66%) will be in this early stage of labor. If this is your first time in labor, this phase may last 20 hours or more. It may be shorter for people who have been in labor before.

### What should I do?

We understand that you have been waiting a long time to meet your baby and that waiting a bit more seems like forever. We suggest spending your early labor at home. Here's why:

- You can be comfortable in your own surroundings.
- You can relax, which will help your labor progress.
- It may make the time seem to go by faster.

Together, we will create a plan for when to come to the hospital or follow-up with your health care provider.

We realize that this can be a time of uncertainty, anxiety, and mixed emotions (on top of not being very restful). We hope the suggestions in this document will make your early labor a bit more comfortable and may even help speed up the process.

### What should I know about early labor?

**Early labor** is the first stage of labor. In this stage, your uterus begins having **contractions** to prepare for childbirth. When you have a contraction, the muscles of the uterus tighten and relax. Contractions help your cervix to thin and shorten (efface) and open (dilate) so your baby can be born.

Labor contractions increase steadily over time. They become stronger and more frequent until they are happening every 5 minutes or more.

You may have already had some “practice” contractions called **Braxton Hicks**. While these contractions may be strong and sometimes uncomfortable, they are not true labor contractions. Braxton Hicks contractions don't help your cervix dilate the way that labor contractions do

### Words you'll hear

**Cervix** - the opening to the uterus. The cervix must be fully dilated (open) for your baby to be born. The cervix is in the back of the vagina.

**Contractions** - when the muscles of the uterus tighten and relax.

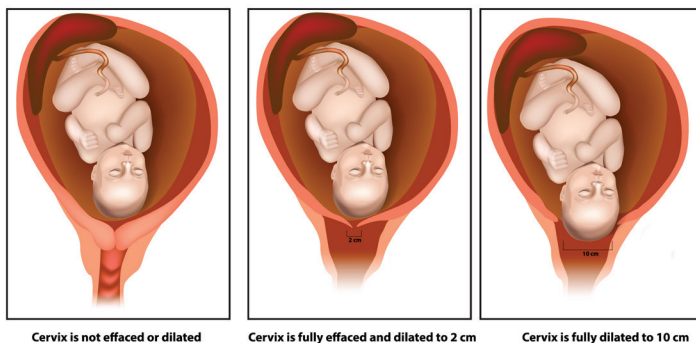
**Dilated** - the openness of your cervix; it is measured in centimeters from 0 to 10.

**Uterus** - where your baby is located.

## How does labor typically progress?

The amount of dilation in your cervix lets us know how close you are to delivery. Labor often progresses like this:

- **0 centimeters:** The cervix is closed.
- **1 to 5 centimeters:** You start having regular contractions to dilate your cervix (early labor). This slowly prepares your body for childbirth.
- **6 centimeters:** This is when active labor begins. Contractions happen in a regular pattern that increases steadily over time.
- **10 centimeters:** Your cervix is completely dilated. You are ready to start pushing.



## What can I do to help my labor progress?

### Diet

- It is important to stay hydrated, especially with water, broths, ice pops (Popsicles).
- Eat light snacks or meals you find comforting.
- As your body transitions into active labor, you will likely be less hungry. You may also feel nauseous (sick to your stomach). Eat light meals that you feel you can tolerate.
- Keep your energy up with good nutrition, including fruits and vegetables.

## Activity

- It is important to rest as your body allows. Talk to your health care team if you find it hard to sleep or rest.
- You should continue to feel your baby move. You can expect to feel 10 movements each hour.
- If your water breaks, avoid sexual intercourse or putting anything into your vagina.

## Positions to try

Changing your position often may help your labor to progress and feel more comfortable.

### Abdominal tilt

Tilt your hips forward. Use your hands to gently lift your belly (or ask a support person). By lifting your belly and tilting your hips forward, you are creating a straighter line for your baby to come down into your pelvis.



### Side-lying resting

Lie on your side and pull your top leg up and over to a 90-degree angle, if possible. This allows a comfortable position for you to rest and your pelvis to open up. Try this position on your left side, and then your right side.



### Exercise/birthing ball

A large exercise ball gives you a break from standing, plus it allows movement and lets gravity do its job. Rocking or swaying on the ball allows you to be upright so your baby can come down into your pelvis.



### Hands and knees

You can also try positioning yourself on your hands and knees, with or without the ball for support.



### How can my support person help me?

Talk to your support person **ahead of time** about ways to help you during labor. For example, your support person can:

- Review different positions and comfort measures with you ahead of time. This will help you feel more prepared.
- Make you healthy snacks ahead of time so you can keep your energy up.
- Encourage you through breathing and relaxation techniques. This will help you stay focused.

### Finding comfort during labor

Some ideas to help refocus, calm anxiety, and relax tense muscles:

- Listen to soft music, watch a movie, or visit social medial (such as Tik-Tok).
- Use meditation or guided imagery to create pictures or stories in your mind.
- Walk around.
- Take a warm bath or shower.
- Try rhythmic movement, like slow dancing or using a rocking chair.
- Try massaging touch to your comfort level on the hips, lower back or feet. You can also try different pressure levels (firm pressure is safe) or vibration.
- **Deep breathing** (may be called the 4-7-8 technique, square breathing, or relaxing breath).
- Aromatherapy (peppermint, lavender and citrus are great choices for nausea and relaxation).
- Wear a belly support band.
- Wrap a hot/cold pack in a towel to protect your skin. Apply cold packs to your lower back or pulse points. Or, use heat on your lower back. Leave the hot/cold pack on for 30 minutes or less.

For helpful videos on comfort during labor, please visit <https://evidencebasedbirth.com/category-pain-management-series>.

## How will I know when I'm in active labor?

Start timing your contractions when they become stronger or more intense. Time your contractions from the start of one contraction until the start of another.

### *Signs of active labor*

- **If this is your first baby:**
  - Your contractions are 5 minutes apart; **and**
  - Last more than 1 minute; **and**
  - Have been consistently getting stronger for 1 hour or more.
- **If this is your second baby or beyond:**
  - Your contractions are less than 10 minutes apart; **and**
  - Have been consistently getting stronger for 1 hour or more.

## When to call your provider:

Call your provider **right away** if you have any of these issues:

- You have any signs of active labor **listed at the left.**
- Bright red bleeding in your underwear.
- You think your water has broken.
- Your temperature 100.4°F (38°C) or higher.
- **If you are less than 34 weeks:**
  - More than 6 contractions in one hour

## Follow-up visits

Please keep your regularly scheduled clinic appointment with your pregnancy provider.