



Labouring at Home

Deciding if you are in labour can be hard. This information sheet will help you decide if your labour has started, how to cope in early labour and when you need to call or see your healthcare provider.

What is Early Labour?

At the start of your labour you may experience mild contractions-tightenings, lower back-ache or period-like cramps.

In the beginning, contractions are usually short (up to 30 seconds) and have no regular pattern. Some may be stronger than others. Contractions may go on for several hours or 'stop and start' over a few days. This is normal. You may notice a 'show' (a mucousy blood tinged vaginal discharge) when you wipe yourself or on your underwear, up to two weeks before. Early labour is an important part of getting your body ready for the birth of your baby but it can be challenging.

What can help during early labour?

It is important that you look after yourself.

Be positive

- Be around positive people. People who believe in you will be your best help during labour.
- Only tell your close support people that you are in early labour. Lots of calls and texts from friends asking if you have had your baby can make you feel anxious

about the length of your labour.

- Do what feels right. If you feel like walking the dog or doing the shopping, do it.
- Remember to drink water because dehydration can slow labour. Eating small meals/snacks will provide much needed energy.

Relax

Being relaxed increases your natural pain relief hormones. Take your mind off the pain by:

- Dealing with contractions one at a time, visualise baby in your arms as you progress through labour
- Focus on your breathing rather than on timing your contractions. Breathe in a way that is comfortable for you. Slow and steady is calming. Remember to sigh out slowly
- Taking warm baths and showers
- Resting in a darkened room, at night try to sleep
- Listening to relaxing music, dancing and swaying
- Watching a movie
- Massages, heat packs, foot rubs
- Trying different positions, for example kneeling or rocking your hips
- Keeping active, but rest when you feel like it - all these distraction techniques can help you cope with pain during labour

How can your support people help in early labour?

Your birth supporters have a very important role in helping you to stay strong and positive and reducing fear and stress. Stress and fear hormones may slow or stop labour and can make contractions more uncomfortable. Your support people can help by:

- Staying close and being attentive to you (for example, offering you food and drink regularly, reminding you to empty your bladder and to try different positions, hold you, rub your back)
- Creating a relaxing and safe environment for you (see above)
- Turning phones off to avoid distractions and minimise calls and messages
- Reassuring and encouraging you of your strength and ability

Can you stay home in early labour?

Research supports women progress readily in the comfort of their own home, unless otherwise advised. It is safe to stay at home during the early part of your labour as long as:

- You are well
- You haven't had any problems during your pregnancy
- You are between 37-42 weeks pregnant
- Your baby is in the head down position
- Your baby is moving normally for you

When should you contact your hospital or care provider?

Always ring if you are worried about anything. Even if you are managing well at home, contacting your hospital or known midwife early on can be reassuring.

They can talk to you about:

- Coping in early labour
- Comfort measures
- A plan for when to come to hospital
- What is normal

When should you go to hospital?

If you are unsure or concerned at any time, please phone your Caseload Midwife or the Birth Suite on 4433 2222. Often talking through your symptoms is enough to determine whether you are able to stay at home or if it is time to come to hospital. Always phone before presenting to hospital.

You should go to hospital if:

- You are having contractions before 37 weeks
- Your contractions are regular, getting stronger and you need to concentrate to get through each one
 - For your first labour at least three contractions in 10 minutes
 - For subsequent labours two contractions in 10 minutes
- Your waters break (or if you think they might have broken)
- You have vaginal bleeding (other than a mucousy blood tinged show)
- You have a fever
- Your baby's movements are different or irregular
- You have pain that doesn't go away (contractions should stop and start with a rest in between)
- You want advice, reassurance or pain relief
- You feel something is wrong

If you do go to the hospital and are not in established labour, you may be encouraged to go home for a while. Don't be disheartened, this is all part of your birth journey. Remember early labour may be long and tiring - but this can be normal.

If you feel that birth is close when you arrive at The Townsville Hospital, leave your vehicle at the drop off zone, the support person should escort Mum via the Emergency Department to the Birth Suite on level two.

If labour progresses quickly at home and you start to feel signs that baby is coming, such as an urge to push, phone an ambulance on 000. The emergency operator will stay on the phone until the ambulance arrives to transport you to hospital.



This publication has been reviewed and approved by Townsville HHS health consumers.



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