

Preparing for Labour

How Will You Know if You're in Labour?

It's easy to confuse pre-labour – the period before labour begins – with true labour. In both, your contractions may be uncomfortable. But there are clear differences:

Pre-Labour	True Labour
<p>Contractions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • not at regular intervals • vary in length • stay the same or become weaker • felt in the lower belly • most uncomfortable when you're moving 	<p>Contractions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • at regular intervals • become longer • become stronger • felt in the belly, lower back or thighs • continue whether you're moving or resting
Cervix remains closed	Cervix thins and shortens ("effaces") and opens ("dilates")
No pinkish discharge ("show")	May be "show" or leaking from the amniotic sac as your water breaks



FAMILY STORY

The start of Michelle's labour was confusing. She was awake all Sunday night with contractions but then fell asleep in the morning and everything stopped. All day it was off and on. She was awake most of Monday night with contractions and a little bit of show. Again it stopped when she had breakfast and a bath. On Tuesday, we went to the hospital exhausted, and our son was born late that night.



TRY THIS

Take a shower. If it's pre-labour, your contractions will probably slow and get shorter. Or try sleeping or distracting yourself with another activity. If you can do either, it's likely pre-labour.

Relaxing for Labour

Practise these techniques now so you'll know which will be the most helpful to you when labour begins:

Focal point concentration – Focus on something or someone other than the pain.

Visualization – Picture a place or a thing that makes you feel relaxed and safe.

Water therapy – Get in the bath or shower. Don't take a bath until you're in active labour, since it may slow your contractions earlier on. And remember to drink lots of water.

Massage – Use light, even strokes on the belly, press on the lower back, or squeeze and release tense areas. Have your partner massage you, or do it yourself.

Complete relaxation – Gently tense and relax each part of your body in turn. Hold each muscle for 3 to 5 seconds. Breathe in as you tense and breathe out as you relax.



PARTNERS

What You Can Do

Read through this section to learn how you can use things like massage to help your partner during labour. Practise relaxation and breathing techniques together throughout the pregnancy. During labour, encourage and praise your partner.

Breathing for Labour

Using breathing techniques during labour can help you relax, focus your attention, relieve your pain and keep oxygen flowing to you and your baby.

Slow breathing – Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth at about half your normal speed. Keep your shoulders relaxed.

Light breathing – Take shallow breaths in and out through your mouth at about twice your normal speed. When a contraction starts to decrease, return to slow breathing. When it stops, take a deep breath. End with a relaxing sigh.

Short breath holding (second stage of labour) – Hold your breath briefly when you're pushing.

Panting (second stage of labour) – Lift your chin, keep your mouth slightly open, and breathe in and out lightly and quickly, like a dog panting. This will help you control the urge to push so your baby's head can come out gently.

What is counter pressure?

Firm, constant pressure applied to a painful area. Your partner can press with their hand or you can lean against a rolled towel, a tennis ball or a wall.



TRY THIS

Think of preparing for labour like getting ready for a marathon: pace yourself, drink water, and practise relaxing and breathing techniques ahead of time so you're ready when you need them.

Comfortable Positions for Labour

Try to stay upright, moving and relaxed. Change positions often.

First stage of labour:

Walking

Good for:

- moving the baby down in your pelvis
- relieving backache

Standing

Good for:

- relieving backache

Rock your hips, lean forward and rest on something, or try counter pressure.

First and second stages of labour:

Sitting upright

Good for:

- relaxing your bottom for pushing
- providing a restful change from standing
- offering a comfortable position if you have electronic fetal monitoring

Try sitting on the toilet.

Semi-sitting

Good for:

- providing rest
- napping between contractions

Lean forward, rest on your partner, and get a back rub.

Birthing Ball

Good for:

- moving the baby down in your pelvis

Lean on the ball while kneeling, or sit on it while someone helps you keep your balance. Don't use a ball if you're slippery with oil or lotion.

Kneeling

Good for:

- taking the pressure off hemorrhoids
- relieving backache

Lean forward on a chair or bed to lessen the strain on your hands and wrists. Try pelvic tilts. Kneel and lean on a support while your partner gives you a massage or uses counter pressure.

Side-lying

Good for:

- alternating with walking during the first stage of labour
- using during birth
- offering a safe position if you've taken pain medication or have an epidural
- taking the pressure off hemorrhoids

Be sure your upper leg is well supported so you can relax between contractions.

Squatting

Good for:

- moving the baby down in your pelvis

Try leaning on a partner or having them wrap their arms around you to give your legs a rest. Change positions between contractions.