

Latent Phase Labour

If you need this leaflet in a different language or accessible format please speak to a member of staff who can arrange it for you.

اگر به این بروشور به زبان دیگر یا در قالب دسترس پذیر نیاز دارید، لطفاً با یکی از کارکنان صحبت کنید تا آن را برای شما تهیه کند.

Jeśli niniejsza ulotka ma być dostępna w innym języku lub formacie, proszę skontaktować się z członkiem personelu, który ją dla Państwa przygotowuje.

Dacă aveți nevoie de această broșură într-o altă limbă sau într-un format accesibil, vă rog să discutați cu un membru al personalului să se ocupe de acest lucru pentru dumneavoastră

如果您需要本传单的其他语言版本或无障碍格式，请联系工作人员为您安排。

إذا احتجت إلى هذه النشرة بلغة أخرى، أو بتنسيق يسهل الوصول إليه، يرجى التحدث إلى أحد الموظفين لترتيب ذلك لك.

Every woman's birth experience is different. Labour is a journey and no two are the same. This leaflet has been written to help you recognise the start of your labour and offer you advice and tips for coping with the latent (early) phase.

The stages of labour:

Latent Phase: The beginning of your labour. It is the part when contractions help the neck of your womb (your cervix) begin to ripen and open to 4cm dilated.

First Stage/Active Labour: This is usually the longest stage and ends when your cervix is fully dilated 10cm.

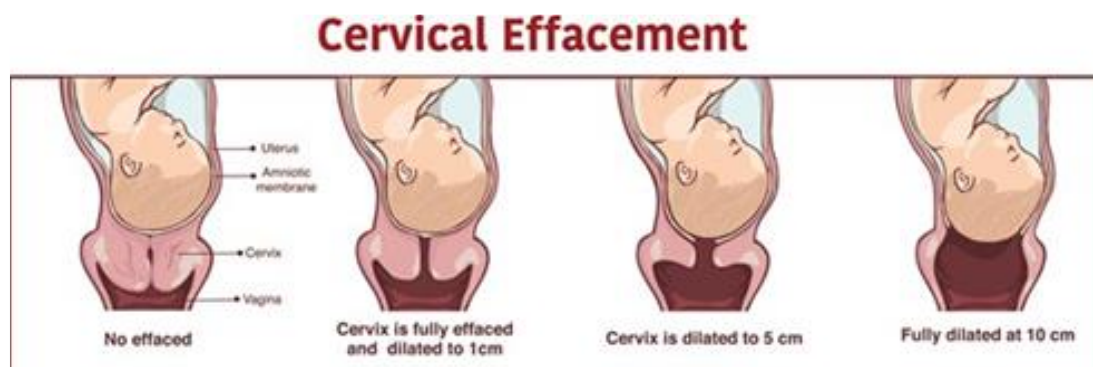
Second Stage: This is the stage of labour when your baby moves down the birth canal and is born.

Third Stage: This is the stage when the placenta is delivered through active management or physiological management.

What is latent phase of labour?

The latent phase of labour is the beginning of labour. At the start of labour your cervix is long, firm, and closed. During latent phase your contractions will cause the cervix to shorten in length, become softer and dilate to 4 centimetres. Active labour occurs next when your contractions are regular in frequency and length of each contraction.

Below is an image of the changes your cervix makes during latent and active labour:



What happens in latent phase?

Throughout the latent phase of labour, the muscles of the womb (uterus) contract which causes the neck of the womb to become soft, shorten in length and dilate to 4 centimetres.

This process can occur over several days and women usually experience backache and period type cramps during this process. The contractions in this stage can last 30-45 seconds. It is common that during this time your contractions can start and stop.

Braxton Hicks contractions can occur anytime during pregnancy. They are the tightening of the muscle of the uterus which last for 30-60 seconds and may happen several times an hour, several times a day.

Contractions in the latent phase are longer, stronger, and more regular than Braxton Hicks.

Some women pass a 'Show' which is a plug of mucous from the neck of the womb (cervix). It is normal that this show is blood stained. Some women pass the mucous plug all at once other women pass small amount over several days.

What can I do?

The best thing you can do during latent phase is to keep relaxed and calm. We recommend staying at home during this stage as you are more likely to be relaxed which will increase the natural hormone known as oxytocin in your body. Oxytocin will make your contractions more regular and ripen the cervix leading to established labour.

You can contact maternity triage and speak to a midwife for support and advice during this time if you require it.

There are many things you can do during latent phase to aid progress

Studies have shown that women who attend hospital in established labour are more likely to experience a normal labour and birth with less intervention.

There are things you can do at home to help cope with the latent phase, such as:

- Potter around the house or go for a gentle walk
- Watch television, read a book, listen to some music
- Take a warm bath or shower
- Have a nap or rest in bed
- Take paracetamol (no more than 8 tablets in 24 hours). Remember to inform your midwife of any medication that you have taken
- Try different positions that you feel most comfortable with, including sitting, standing, squatting, kneeling, laying on your left side or on all fours. Some women also find it relaxing to rock back and forth while standing. Sitting on a birthing ball making big hip circles can help with back pain. **Remaining upright has been proven to help labour to progress**
- Drink plenty of fluids - isotonic sports drinks are a good way of boosting energy levels while keeping you hydrated. **However, stimulant drinks containing caffeine should be avoided during pregnancy**
- Eat little and often, you will need your energy and as labour progresses your appetite will diminish
- Use a hot water bottle (wrap with a towel) on any areas that ache-your lower back, under your bump or between your thighs
- A cool gel pack may help backache
- Use breathing techniques. Keep your breathing slow and steady during a contraction. Focus on your breathing instead of the pain
- Continue with your daily routine. This is a great source of distraction and will prevent you from clock watching
- If you would like to use alternative therapies, this would be the optimal time to do so.

How your birthing partner can help

- Massage- you may have been shown in a parent craft class or if not, asking your birthing partner to massage your lower back can be a great source of relief and also a good way to get them involved!
- They can provide you with light meals and encourage you to drink
- If you have a TENS machine your birthing partner can help you apply it
- Birthing partners can also make family and friends aware that you are in the latent phase of labour and encourage them to give support rather than raise concerns
- Keeping you company and helping you focus on the positive aspect of labour.

When to inform the midwife

- You think you may be in the latent phase of labour and would like to discuss this with a midwife
- You think you may be in active phase of labour when your contractions will become stronger and more frequent. They may last 45-60 seconds every 3-5 minutes or more
- You think your waters may have broken
- If you have any fresh red bleeding from your vagina
- If you think your baby's pattern of movement is reduced within a 24-hour period
- You have any concerns, worries or questions.

Research tells us that women who spend the early part of their labour at home are less likely to experience medical interventions such as caesarean section, a drip to speed up labour, or develop an infection.

You can contact us 24 hours a day, 7 days a week on our Maternity Triage number:

0151 290 4489

Useful websites

www.nct.org.uk/birth/first-stage-labour



**Mersey and West Lancashire
Teaching Hospitals**
NHS Trust

Whiston Hospital
Warrington Road,
Prescot, Merseyside, L35 5DR
Telephone: 0151 426 1600

St Helens Hospital
Marshall Cross Road,
St Helens, Merseyside, WA9 3DA
Telephone: 01744 26633