



Labor and Birth Preparation

Labor looks unique for every woman... here are some ideas to help you navigate it.

- **When you are in labor** - When contractions are having a consistent pattern for more than an hour, and cause some discomfort, you may be in labor.
- **Measuring contractions (5-1-1)** - Measure from the beginning of one contraction to the beginning of the next, this is "how far apart" they are. Measuring the length of a contraction is also a useful piece of information to tell the midwife when you call. There are many apps for this, or you can use pen and paper with a watch. If your contractions are 5 minutes apart and a minute long for an hour, call the midwife. Time the contractions for a little while, and again after a change.
- **Water breaking** - The amniotic sac sometimes breaks before labor, during labor, during pushing, or not until after the baby is born. If your water breaks before the midwife has arrived, note the color, any odor, and if the baby is moving normally (drink some cold juice and lay down for a few minutes to check in on baby). Then call the midwife. You can wear a clean menstrual pad if it is leaking.
- **Things to do in early labor** - Prep the bed – make the bed as you want to be tucked into after the birth with a fitted sheet and a flat sheet. Then put a plastic sheet on top of that, and a fitted sheet that you are not attached to on top of everything (we do our best to prevent stains, but there's no guarantee). Prep the tub – if you are having a rented tub at your labor, lay a plastic sheet on the floor first, then an old sheet or blanket, then the tub with its liner. Have the hose and adaptor ready – you've already figured out where this will go and made sure it will work. Pack a bag – we don't plan on going to the hospital, but occasionally we must. Have a contingency bag by the front door with your keys, wallets, purses, etc; a dress that is easy to slip on, coats, and slip-on shoes. Unlock the front door for the midwives and turn the heat up.
- **Ins and Outs** – Drink water or electrolyte drinks after every contraction. Use a straw if that will make it easier. Also eat something in early labor that is nutritious and light like miso soup, chicken broth, or anything that you are craving. If you are repeatedly vomiting in early labor, tell the midwife and do your best to stay hydrated with small sips of coconut water. Pee regularly during labor. You may have loose bowels for a day before labor begins – this is normal, stay hydrated.
- **During contractions** – Use the powerful surges to remind yourself to relax and open. If it is night and you can, sleep. If it is day time, go about your normal activities until you can't any longer. Stay busy by taking walks, going to a movie, or baking a cake. With each contraction, try relaxing your bottom just like you do when you pee – sitting on the toilet during contractions is great. Side-lying with your bottom leg straight and the top leg bent up to your belly as far as it will go is a great position to rest in during labor. When contractions are strong enough to require your full attention ask visitors to leave, go into your sanctuary, take a shower, darken the room, or put on music.
- **Partners/labor support people** – Talk with the birthing woman in advance to find out what her preferences are, and be flexible with any plans. Offer water or electrolyte drinks after every contraction. Only ask questions of a laboring woman between contractions. Ask if she would like privacy or support. Steady low back pressure sometimes helps, ask if you can, how hard, and where. Massaging her legs, arms or head may feel good. During strong contractions, encouraging phrases may include "good," "open," "you are doing so much hard work," "relax," "you love your baby so much," and sometimes quiet is best. Talk to the baby, remind him or her that this is a safe normal process and that soon you both will get to kiss and hold them in your arms.