



The Process of Labor and Birth

As your pregnancy progresses and you get closer to your due date, you begin to prepare for the birth of your baby. We offer this chart as a tool to help you learn the process of labor and birth. We hope the birth of your baby is a wonderful and memorable event at the Maternity and Infant Center at University of Washington Medical Center.

If you think you may be in labor, call 206-598-4616.

The chart on the following pages provides an overview of the process of labor and vaginal birth. Your body will progress through these stages in the hours before, during and after the birth of your baby. This chart provides a picture of most women's experience as they labor and give birth. You may have all or some of the body changes and feelings described in the chart.

Stage One most often begins with contractions and lasts until your cervix is dilated to 10 centimeters.




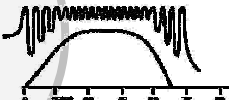

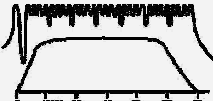

Stage Two begins when your cervix is fully dilated and is called the "pushing" stage. You push when your uterus contracts, and this "pushing" continues until your baby is born.

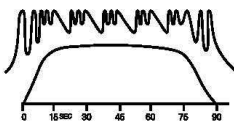

Stage Three begins after the birth of your baby and lasts until your placenta is delivered.

Stage Four, or recovery, lasts for several hours after the birth of your baby as your body adjusts to the physical and emotional changes that come with the birth.

Review the "Breathing" and "Actions" sections for ideas to help you cope with labor and for how your birth partner can help you. Please use this chart as a starting point, and build on it. Most likely, you have coping methods you use when you are faced with a painful, stressful, or challenging situation. Use these proven coping skills during your labor. Try some of our suggestions, and think of other ideas that might help you to cope during labor.

The Stages of Labor and Birth

Stage	Physical Changes	Cervix	Contractions and Breathing	Feelings	Actions	
Stage One	Pre-Labor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contractions without progress • Cervix ripens • Cervix may efface • Cervix may dilate 1 to 2 cm • May have show of blood or mucus 	1 cm		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anxious • Looking forward to birth and baby 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start or continue nesting • Pack your bags for the hospital
	Early Labor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contractions becoming regular • Cervix effaces, dilates 2 to 4 cm 	3 cm		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excited • Impatient • Uncertain 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Try distraction • Movie • Walk • Relax at home • Take a shower • Change positions • Drink fluids/ eat lightly • Empty bladder
	Active Labor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contractions longer, stronger, closer together • Membranes may break • Cervix effaces, dilates 4 to 8 cm 	4 cm		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focused • Serious • Starting to get tired 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use patterned breathing • Walk • Hydrotherapy • Change positions • Drink fluids/ eat lightly • Empty bladder • Epidural anesthesia if desired
	Transition Labor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contractions intense with multiple peaks • Minimal rest • Cervix dilates 8 to 10 cm 	10 cm		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focused on here and now, tunnel vision • Difficulty stating needs • Sensitive to touch • Possible urge to push • Possible nausea • Grumpy • Shaky 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contractions without progress

Stage ▼	Physical Changes	Cervix	Contractions and Breathing	Feelings	Actions
Stage Two	<p>Pushing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Possible lull in contractions • Spontaneous urge or directed pushing • Skin between vagina and anus (perineum) may feel burning 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anticipating birth • Possible renewed energy • Tired, sleepy • Sweaty 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ice chips if desired • Compresses may feel good • Possible bowel movements
	<p>Birth</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baby's head crowns • Baby is born 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Happy • Relieved 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Push baby out • Focus on baby
Stage Three	<p>Deliver Placenta</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Placenta is delivered • May have contractions, afterpains • Stitching of tear or cut (episiotomy) if needed 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May have shakes • May feel cold, chilled 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on baby
Stage Four	<p>Recovery</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bleeding, lochia • May have contractions, afterpains • Perineum may be sore • Hungry, thirsty 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elated, content • May be very tired • Want to talk about the birth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Breastfeed baby when comfortable • Eat and drink • Have help first time out of bed • Ice on perineum • Call family, friends • Have visitors

Questions?

Your questions are important. If you have questions about yourself, call your obstetric provider during office hours. Clinics are closed 5 p.m. to 8 a.m. and on weekends. When your provider's office is closed, call:

Labor and Delivery:
206-598-4616

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