

Coping with the Latent Phase of Labour

FAMILIES DIVISION Patient Information Leaflet



Options available

If you'd like a large print, audio, Braille or a translated version of this leaflet then please call:

01253 955588

Our Four Values:

People Centred

Positive

Compassion

Excellence

What is the latent stage of labour?

The latent phase of labour is the early part of the first stage of labour.

Before labour starts, the neck of the womb is long and firm. During the latent stage, the muscles of the uterus (womb) contract and make the cervix become flat and soft. During this time, the cervix will start to thin out and dilate. This is called cervical effacement or thinning of the cervix.

The latent phase is unique to each woman. Some may experience backache or cramps that may be accompanied by tightenings. It is normal to experience these symptoms, which may disappear after a few hours or continue into active labour. The latent phase may last several days (or even weeks), as the body prepares itself for active labour. During this time, you may have a 'Bloody Show'. This is mucus that may be tinged pink or brown from blood. Although it is a sign that your body is preparing for labour, it may still be a while before "active" labour begins.

Latent phase of labour is often confused with Braxton Hicks, which is commonly known as practice or false labour.

Pre-labour/Braxton Hicks

Irregular painful, short contractions

Contractions not becoming more frequent, longer lasting or stronger

No cervical dilatation

Latent Phase

Irregular painful, short contractions

Contractions not becoming more frequent, longer lasting or stronger

Cervix starts to change and open to 4cm

Active phase

Regular painful contractions, getting stronger

Contractions becoming frequent: 1 every 5 minutes

Cervix 4 cm and more

What can I do for myself during the latent stage?

As the latent phase of labour may last for some time, it is important that you look after yourself.

Things you may want to try:

- A warm bath (not too hot, but deep enough to cover your bump) and analgesia (pain relief), such as Paracetamol (no more than eight in a 24 hour period)
- Heat packs or cooled gel packs for back pain
- A massage by your birth partner
- Pottering around the house and keeping yourself occupied
- Relaxation, such as napping or watching a DVD
- Taking a walk or going shopping
- Practice your breathing techniques - breathing in gently and sighing out slowly
- Pack your essentials, including snacks and drinks for both you and your birthing partner

Labour can be very tiring and hard work. Your body will need a lot of energy. Remember to eat and drink small amounts and rest throughout this time to avoid exhaustion and dehydration. (Isotonic drinks and soups can be very helpful.

When do I contact the delivery suite?

Whether you have planned a hospital or home birth, it is important that you keep delivery suite informed of any events. Please give your name and have your antenatal hand-held notes available when you phone the delivery suite, as this will help the midwife to answer any questions and give appropriate support and advice. The midwife may advise you to stay at home and follow the above mentioned steps for coping with the latent stage of labour. This is because research has shown that staying at home during this time is beneficial for women and their labour.

You will need to let the delivery suite midwives know as soon as possible if:

- baby's moving pattern changes, i.e., becomes slower or stops
- your waters break, also known as "spontaneous rupture of membranes".
The
- waters should be clear. you notice any bleeding that is different from a 'Bloody Show'.
- you become unwell

Remember- if you are concerned or need advice, please phone delivery suite on 01253 953618

Useful contact details

Delivery Suite: 01253 953618

Hospital Switchboard: 01253 300000

Patient Relations Department

The Patient Relations Department offer impartial advice and deal with any concerns or complaints the Trust receives. You can contact them via:

Tel: 01253 955589

email: patient.relations@bfwh.nhs.uk

You can also write to us at:

Patient Relations Department, Blackpool Victoria Hospital, Whinney Heys Road, Blackpool FY3 8NR

Further information is available on our website:

www.bfwh.nhs.uk

References

This leaflet is evidence based wherever the appropriate evidence is available, and represents an accumulation of expert opinion and professional interpretation.

Details of the references used in writing this leaflet are available on request from:

Policy Co-ordinator/Archivist 01253 953397

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