

When labour starts...

Early labour is a normal part of the birthing process

What is early labour?

It is when irregular contractions begin to occur, and your cervix softens, shortens and prepares to open. *Early labour can last many hours and is a normal part of the birthing process.*

What does early labour feel like?

- Contractions are mild to moderate, lasting 30-45 seconds and often irregular
- You may have backache or cramping
- You may have heavy vaginal discharge with blood or mucous
- Your waters may break in a gush or slow leak
- You may have stomach upset
- You may have difficulty sleeping or be emotional

What can I do for comfort in early labour?

- Contact your support person
- Alternate between an activity such as walking and rest
- Eat light meals if you are hungry
- Drink plenty of fluids
- Breathe slowly through contractions
- Have a shower or bath
- Change position often (see over for examples)
- Apply heat to your lower back
- Try a massage
- Try distracting yourself with an activity you enjoy

What can I do if I need more help coping with contractions?

- Call your doula (if you have one) and have your partner or support person stay with you
- Call your doctor or midwife (Ask them ahead of time how to reach them outside of office hours)
- Visit the hospital for assessment, information and support - the hospital staff may advise you to go home and return later
- Call your hospital's maternity unit and speak to one of the nurses

Call your doctor or midwife if:

- Your contractions are much stronger and closer together
- You are having trouble coping with your contractions at home
- You feel like pushing or bearing down with each contraction
- You think your water has broken
- You have heavy vaginal bleeding (more than a period)
- You have noticed that your baby is moving much less than normal
- You have a fever of 38 C (100.4 F) or higher

Your doctor or midwife can help you decide when it is time to go to the hospital.

If you are unable to contact your doctor or midwife call the maternity unit at your local hospital.

Example Labour Positions



Standing



Birthing Ball



Sitting upright



Kneeling



Semi-sitting



Side-lying