



# EARLY LABOUR

## Tips for support people

### What is early labour?

Early labour is the beginning of the labour process. For many people, it's also the longest stage. This is when the person you are supporting may start to experience contractions (tightening and relaxing of the uterus).

Contractions in early labour may feel like strong menstrual cramps, or they may feel so intense that the birthing person needs to focus on their breathing and stop talking.

The timing of contractions will vary, and they may even stop for a while, then start again. While early labour is an exciting phase, it's also normal for you to feel nervous and unsure about how to provide support.

### How can I prepare for early labour?

Taking a prenatal class together can help you understand what to expect. It's important to talk about anything specific the person you are supporting would like during early labour.



#### **You can ask:**

- Who would you like to be present? (e.g., family, friends, a doula)
- What comfort methods for pain would you prefer? (e.g., breathing exercises, massage, shower or bath, TENS, aromatherapy)
- Are there any other items you'll want? (e.g., an exercise ball, a music playlist, snacks and drinks)
- What else might be helpful for me to do or say?
- Is there anything you want to avoid?

Having these talks before labour can help you feel more prepared, but keep in mind that everyone's labour is unique. Sometimes the tools and strategies you discussed may not be helpful in the moment. Stay open and flexible if needs and plans change. Being prepared with different strategies can help both of you find what works best.

## How can I provide support in early labour?

Most people benefit from spending early labour at home or in another place that feels relaxing and peaceful. The person you are supporting typically won't be admitted to the hospital or birth centre or have their midwife stay with them at home until they are in active labour. Going to the hospital in early labour is not safer, and it can increase the chances of medical interventions, like a C-section.

### During early labour, there are several ways you can lend support, including:



#### Be present:

Be there for them and listen to their needs in the moment.



#### Remind them to eat and drink:

Offer water and have some favourite snacks and drinks on hand.



#### Help pass the time:

Watch a movie together, play a game, go for a walk, listen to music or participate in cultural, religious or other traditional practices.



#### Support their pain management:

Be available to help with coping strategies and comfort methods.



#### Give encouragement:

Provide words of support and reassurance.



#### Support their decisions:

Advocate for what the birthing person wants.



#### Be prepared to go to the hospital if needed:

Have a bag packed. Organize care for any children and pets.

## When should we contact the midwife?

Typically, you should wait to call the midwife until the person you're supporting is in active labour. At some point in the weeks leading up to the birth, the midwife will let you know when to contact them.

**Contact the midwife right away if the birthing person has any of these symptoms:**

- Fresh, bright red bleeding in their underwear that is not mucus-like or pink
- A fever of 100.4°F (38°C) or higher
- Sudden or severe headache
- Changes in their vision (e.g., blurred vision, seeing spots or auras)
- Severe nausea and/or vomiting
- A decrease in the baby's movement

## Notes

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