KEEP CALM AND LABOR ON!

Know what to expect in early labor.

OH BABY! YOU JUST HAD YOUR FIRST CONTRACTION.
IS THIS IT? SHOULD YOU GRAB YOUR BIRTHING BAG AND HEAD OUT?

You may be in **early labor** — the phase that comes before **active labor**.

**WHAT’S EARLY LABOR LIKE?**

- Contractions are getting stronger and settling into a regular pattern
- As contractions strengthen, you’ll need to work harder and find a rhythm
- The cervix dilates to 6 cm to prepare for birth, as the baby moves down in your pelvis
- Early labor is most often the longest phase, more than half of the total labor time

**DID YOU KNOW?**

The average length of early labor is **6-12 hours** for first-time parents (early labor is usually shorter for experienced moms). It may even last **24 hours or more**, which can be perfectly normal.

**THERE ARE BENEFITS TO STAYING HOME DURING LABOR AS LONG AS POSSIBLE:**

- Gives you more **flexibility** to move freely—which can **reduce** the risk of medical interventions
- Helps **increase** the labor hormone, oxytocin—which **allows** the cervix to thin and open

**HOW CAN YOUR PARTNER AND DOULA SUPPORT YOU?**

- Offering comfort, physical care and reassurance
- Helping time contractions
- Keeping your mind off labor with simple activities, like playing games

**STAY CONNECTED**

- Resting and relaxing
- Drinking plenty of fluids and eating what appeals to you
- Going for a short walk
- Moving around or changing positions
- Focusing on slow, deep breathing
- Using a warm pad or ice pack on your lower back
- Reading a good book or watching TV
- Asking your doula or partner for a gentle massage

**HOW DO I KNOW WHEN TO GO?**

Active labor begins when contractions are roughly 3-5 minutes apart, last 1 minute and have been that way for 1-2 hours. However, listen to your body. If you feel it’s time to go to your birthing facility, follow that instinct and/or call your care provider first, especially if your water breaks.

LEARN MORE ABOUT EARLY LABOR IN A LAMAZE CLASS, IN-PERSON OR ONLINE, SO YOU CAN BE PREPARED! VISIT LAMAZE.ORG TO LEARN MORE.

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