



Let's Labor! ~ Positions & Comfort Measures Cliff Notes

Possibly Labor: Crampy, irritable backache, PMS symptoms, nesting urge, flu-like symptoms

Probably Labor: Bloody show, amniotic fluid releases, pre-labor contractions (irregular; discomfort mostly in the front of the belly; change or stop if you change your activity)

Positively Labor: Progressing contractions (longer, stronger, closer together), cervical dilation

Normalize. Go on a date! And as with any part of labor, call your care provider with questions or concerns.

Early Labor

What's Happening: Cervix effaces from 50-100%, dilates to 4 cm. Contractions 5-30 minutes apart, 30-45 seconds long. Mom may want to focus during contractions, but can walk or talk if desired. Can usually relax between contractions - world is open. Early labor can last 2-24 hours or more.

Breathing techniques: No special breathing techniques are needed. Many moms find it helpful to begin a deep relaxation/yoga breath. Begin & end contractions with a cleansing breath, use deep abdominal breathing through the contraction.

Comfort Techniques: Alternate rest & relaxation with distracting activities. Being active (going for brief, brisk walks, dancing, shopping) can help labor to progress, but very important not to exhaust yourself. Try to be relaxed, & treat this as a vacation day.

If labor is moving very slowly, consult with caregiver about the possibility of using natural augmentation methods such as nipple stimulation or acupressure.

What should support people do: Time contractions occasionally (every few hours, or when things seem to change significantly). Ibirth app is helpful. Time six contractions in a row, & record: when the contraction began, how long it lasted, & how long it had been since the start of the last one. Encourage mom to eat, drink, & go to the bathroom at least once an hour.



Active Labor

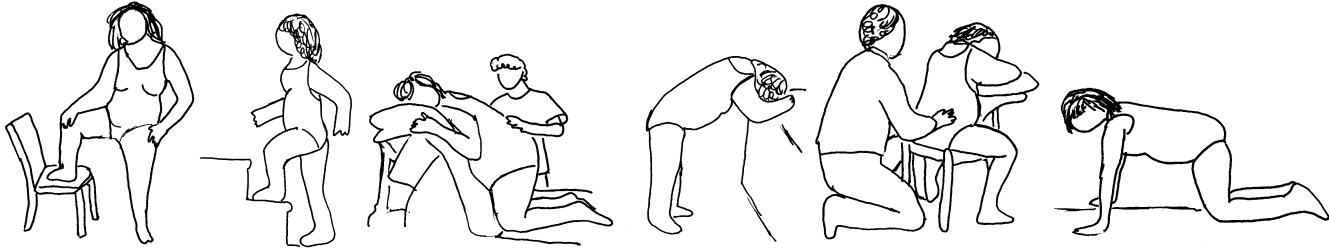
What's Happening: Cervix completely effaced, dilates from 4-8 cm. Contractions 3-5 minutes apart, lasting 40-70 seconds. Contractions are more intense, mom may not be able to walk & talk during contractions - world closes in. Mom tends to become focused. May last from 30 minutes to 10 hours.

A suggestion for when to go to hospital: 5-1-1. When contractions are no more than five minutes apart, lasting for at least one minute, with that pattern established for at least one hour.

Breathing Techniques: Deep relaxation/yoga breath with vocalization. Open. Breath in through nose (or mouth, if necessary), and exhale using the word, 'Open,' with a long 'OOOO...' Repeat through contraction.

Comfort Techniques for Active Labor: warm bath, comforting touch (massage), effleurage (light stroking), counter pressure on sacrum, double hip squeeze, hot/cold (heating pads, ice packs, or cool cloths on her forehead & back of neck). Vocalization: singing, moaning, 'open.' Sensory Distractions: music, aromatherapy, picture to see as focal point. Relaxation Techniques: touch relaxation, visualization, breathing in energy & strength, breathing out tension. Encouragement & support.

What should support people do? Remind mom to drink after each contraction, & go to the bathroom once an hour. Help with comfort techniques. Establish rituals by doing the same thing on each contraction, for as long as that works, then switching to new ritual. Let her rest when she needs to, but remind her that being physically active can help labor progress.



Transition

What's Happening: Cervix dilates to 10 cm. Contractions 2-3 minutes apart, 60-90 seconds long. Intense. World closed. Mom may be discouraged, scared, angry. May be trembling, hot/cold, nauseous, says, 'Can't do it!' May last 10 minutes to 2.5 hours. Average 1-1.5 hours in first time moms.

Breathing Techniques: Yoga breath, 'Open' on exhale, short breaths on top of contraction.

Comfort Techniques: Any of the techniques & positions from active labor. Follow her cues.

What should support people do? Stay very close to mom, establish eye contact. Give short & simple directions, don't ask a lot of questions. Speak calmly, & help to reassure her.

Second Stage: Birth

What's Happening: Cervix has dilated, baby has descended & is ready to be delivered. Contractions may be accompanied by strong urge to push. (May feel like a need to have a bowel movement.) Mom's vocalizations may change to deep grunts or groans.

How long will it last? Anywhere from a few minutes to four hours. Typically 1-2 hours. When should mom start pushing? Consult with caregivers before starting to bear down.

Breathing Techniques: With each contraction, take in a deep breath, then use 'Down' or 'Out' while exhaling or gently holding breath. Then relax & breathe. Then bear down again. In between contractions, breathe normally & rest. There may be a time to hold breath & curl around baby near the end of pushing.

Comfort: Any of the ideas above. A cool cloth on her forehead or neck is especially popular.

What should partners do: Help support mom in chosen position. Help guide pushing efforts & breathing. Lots of encouragement & reassurance. Reinforce care givers suggestions.



(Material excerpted from 'Labor Support: The Cliff Notes Version,' by Janelle Durham)