

# Parent information

# Queensland Clinical Guidelines

## Early labour

This information sheet aims to answer some commonly asked questions about early labour.

**IMPORTANT:** This is general information only. Ask your doctor, midwife or nurse about your own situation.

Deciding if you are in labour can sometimes be difficult. This information sheet will help you work out if your labour has started, how to manage in early labour and when you need to call or see your healthcare provider.

### What is early labour?

At the start of your labour, you may experience mild contractions. Mild contractions usually feel similar to cramping, or period pain or pain in your lower back.

They are usually short (up to 30 seconds) and have no regular pattern. Some may feel stronger than others. These contractions may get steadily stronger and longer lasting, or they might stop and start over a few days. This is normal. It is your body's way of preparing itself for birth by softening the cervix and allowing your baby to enter the birth canal.

You may notice a 'show', (a mucousy blood-tinged vaginal discharge), when you wipe yourself or in your underwear.

Early labour is an important part of getting your body ready for the birth of your baby, but it can be tiring, so rest when you can.

### Staying home in early labour?

It is safe to stay at home (and is usually recommended) during the early part of your labour as long as:

- you are feeling well
- you haven't had any problems during your pregnancy
- you are greater than 37 weeks pregnant
- your baby is in the head down position

### SUPPORT DURING EARLY LABOUR

#### Contacting your hospital or healthcare provider

Always ring if you are worried about anything. Even if you are managing well at home, contacting your hospital or healthcare provider early-on in labour can be reassuring. They can talk to you about:

- Managing in early labour
- Comfort measures
- A plan for when to come to hospital
- What is normal



#### When to go to hospital

You should go to hospital if:

- Your contractions are regular, frequent and strong
  - Usually at least 3 contractions in 10 minutes if this is your first labour and you feel the need to concentrate harder to get through each one
- Your waters break (or you think they might have broken)
- You:
  - want advice, reassurance, or pain relief
  - haven't felt your baby move as much as usual
  - have pain that doesn't go away (contractions should stop and start with a rest in-between)
  - have vaginal bleeding (other than a mucousy blood-tinged 'show')
  - don't feel well, or you feel that "something isn't right"
  - are having difficulty maintaining focus during contractions or need support



If you do go to the hospital and are still in early labour, you may be encouraged to go home for a while. Some women feel disheartened if this happens, just remember this is normal and part of a birth experience. Early labour can sometimes be long, tiring and frustrating but this is normal.



## What can help during early labour?

It is important that you look after yourself during early labour.

### Be positive

- surround yourself with positive people. People who believe in you will be your best help during labour
- if you choose, only tell your close support people that you are in early labour. Lots of calls and texts from friends asking if you have had your baby can make you worry about how your labour is going
- do what feels right. If you feel like walking the dog or doing the shopping, do it
- focus on your breathing rather than on timing your contractions
- eat foods as you wish
- remember to drink plenty of water to avoid becoming dehydrated

### Relax

Being relaxed increases your natural pain relief hormones. These hormones help your body relax ligaments and prepare your body for labour.

You can try:

- warm baths and showers
- resting in a darkened room
- listening to music, dancing, and swaying
- watching a movie or doing light activities around the house (e.g. preparing your hospital bag)
- massages, heat packs, foot rubs
- keeping active using upright, forward leaning positions, but resting when you feel like it
- different positions, for example kneeling, rocking your hips or using a birth ball

## How can your support people help in early labour?

The people who you choose to support you during labour have a very important role in helping you to stay strong and positive and reducing fear and stress. Stress and fear hormones may slow or stop labour and may make contractions more painful.

Your support people can help by:

- staying close and being attentive to you, (for example offering you food and drink regularly, reminding you to empty your bladder, to try different positions and accompany you if you go out)
- helping you to relax with foot or shoulder rubs, massages or heat packs, and creating a quiet space for you
- turning phones off to avoid distractions, and minimise calls and messages
- encouraging you to focus on your baby and sharing your birth affirmations, if you have them



*Image: woman in early labour with support people*

## Support & Information

**Queensland Clinical Guidelines Parent information** [www.health.qld.gov.au/qcg](http://www.health.qld.gov.au/qcg)

**13HEALTH** (13 432584) telephone service providing health information, referral and services to the public.

[www.qld.gov.au/health/contacts/advice/13health](http://www.qld.gov.au/health/contacts/advice/13health)

**Pregnancy, Birth & Baby Helpline** (1800 882 436) offers free, confidential, professional information and counselling about conception, pregnancy, birthing and postnatal care. [www.health.gov.au/pregnancyhelpline](http://www.health.gov.au/pregnancyhelpline)

**Mum Space:** Digital resources supporting mental and emotional wellbeing during and beyond pregnancy.

[www.mumspace.com.au](http://www.mumspace.com.au)

**Raising Children** provides health information on pregnancy, birth and the postnatal period. [www.raisingchildren.net.au](http://www.raisingchildren.net.au)

**Lifeline** (13 11 14) Lifeline offers a telephone crisis support service to anyone. [www.lifeline.org.au](http://www.lifeline.org.au)

**Child Health Service** Provides newborn drop-in services, early feeding and support, child health clinics. Refer to [www.childrens.health.qld.gov.au/community-health/child-health-service](http://www.childrens.health.qld.gov.au/community-health/child-health-service) for your nearest service

**Women's Health Queensland Wide** (1800 017 676) offers health promotion, information and education service for women and health professionals throughout Queensland. [www.womhealth.org.au](http://www.womhealth.org.au)

**Australian Breastfeeding Association** (1800 686 268) Community based self-help group offers information, counselling, and support services, on breastfeeding issues. [www.breastfeeding.asn.au](http://www.breastfeeding.asn.au)

**Inform my care is a website to compare information about public and private hospitals in Queensland**

[www.informmycare.qld.gov.au](http://www.informmycare.qld.gov.au)

**Childbirth connection** offers resources to help make informed decisions and receive care that is in line with your values and preferences [www.childbirthconnection.org/](http://www.childbirthconnection.org/)

**Lamaze International** offers resources to support birthing options. [www.lamaze.org](http://www.lamaze.org)