

Stages of Labor

Stage One

Early Labor

DILATION:

0-5 cm

DURATION:

Varies widely; a few hours to a few days

In most cases, you'll spend much of this phase at home and you won't need to head to the hospital until contractions are closer together. Talk to your doctor/midwife for any specific guidance about when to head to the hospital. To encourage labor progress and keep comfortable, try going for a walk, taking a shower or bath, changing positions, or using deep breathing and relaxation techniques. Try to stay hydrated and rest as much as you can!

Active Labor

DILATION:

6-8 cm

DURATION:

Typically a few hours or more

During this phase, contractions will become stronger and closer together. Look to your labor partner and healthcare team for encouragement and support. Try using deep breathing, relaxation techniques, and changing positions to manage the pain. You can also ask for medical pain relief options like an epidural or IV pain medications if you'd like.

Transition

DILATION:

8-10 cm

DURATION:

A few minutes to a few hours

This is the most intense stage, and you may feel really overwhelmed. You may experience intense pressure that feels like you have to poop. It's also normal to feel nausea, chills, or shaking due to changes in hormones. Try to get through one contraction at a time! Use deep breathing techniques and try to keep any grunts or groans low and guttural. You can do this!

Stage Two

Pushing

DILATION:

10 cm

DURATION:

A few minutes to a few hours

When it's time to push, you may want to experiment with different positions until you find one that feels best, such as side lying, squatting, or getting on hands and knees. Your doctor or midwife may count to 10 to guide you through contractions if you wish. It may be helpful to tuck your chin to your chest or even look in a mirror as your baby is coming out.

Stage Three

Placenta Delivery

DURATION:

Typically within 30 minutes after birth

Following birth, your baby will typically be placed on your chest for skin-to-skin contact and their umbilical cord will be cut. You may feel some mild, less painful contractions (more like cramps) that will help move your placenta into the birth canal. After you deliver the placenta, a member of your healthcare team may massage your belly to help the uterus contract and lessen bleeding (this is called fundal massage).