

For most women, spending the early part of labor at home is recommended, safe, and decreases the chance of having a cesarean birth (C-section). During early labor it is important to save your energy by resting, eating and drinking. Early labor can be hard! Here are some tips to help you manage the work of early labor at home, and to know when to go to the hospital.

What do labor contractions feel like?

Contractions feel like very painful menstrual cramps in the low abdomen (belly), pelvis, hips, low back and upper thighs. They build to a peak and then they go away.

What should I do at home when I have contractions?

- **Rest as much as possible.** During the day alternate between gentle activities with naps and relaxation. At night, or anytime you are tired, do your best to sleep between and through as many contractions as possible. Even if your sleep is very interrupted trying to rest preserves your energy for active labor.

Tips for sleep:

- Use pillows under your head and belly and to support your back so you can be more comfortable lying on your side. Try side-lying with and without pillows between your knees.
- Add a heating pad on your lower back or belly to help soothe cramps.
- Forward leaning is often comfortable in labor, try resting on your knees with your head resting on the couch or on your sitting partner's lap.
- Quiet music, recorded sleep stories, or meditations can help you rest. Have your partner record themselves reading to you or find an app or web site you like such as:

- Calm

- Insight Timer
 - 10% Happier
 - Headspace
- **Distraction** is more restful than active coping measures until the pain begins to demand more attention. Watch a movie, go to a store, enjoy a phone call or a simple meal with loved ones.
 - **Ease tension.** As the pain increases, switch to techniques to keep your body loose and overcome the tendency to clench up or brace yourself during pain. Tips for easing tension:
 - Prop yourself in a comfortable position and concentrate on:
 - Resting your open hands
 - Lowering your shoulders
 - Relaxing your face muscles
 - Allowing your ankles to flop outwards

You will feel the tightening or pressure with each contraction, but you can concentrate on letting your body be soft and open everywhere else.
 - Focus on taking long slow breaths. Count through your inhales and exhales and try to make each one just a little longer.
 - Stand and sway, or sit and rock. Using rhythm is very helpful.
 - Get into a tub or take a shower. Let the warmth relax you.
 - Create short goals. For example, plan to take a walk for 30 min, shower for 30 min and then lay down for 30 min. Repeat this cycle.
 - Find a simple phrase (or mantra) to repeat in your mind, or to ask your partner to say it to you, to get you through contractions such as: “Open” “OK, OK” “Each one ends” “Keep it flowing”. Prayers or affirmations may become mantras as well.

- Visualize something productive or calming – the opening of your cervix or vulva, warm rays of sun, the power of wind or water carrying you along.
- **Snack** on small amounts of light, easily digested foods
 - Drink at least 8 ounces of fluids each hour (juice, sports drinks, broth, tea with honey, pop/soda)
 - If you feel nauseous or vomit during labor, this is normal. Wait a short while and continue to drink.

How can others help?

Others can help you by:

- Bringing water and snacks.
- Helping tuck pillows behind your back, under your knees, etc.
- Giving back rubs, hand massage, or simply pressing on areas that hurt and holding pressure.
- Comforting or distracting you with conversation.
- Reminding you that it is best to stay home, and committing to being with you.
- Encouraging and reminding that you can do this!
- Expressing gratitude for all you are doing.

When should I call Triage?

Call Triage when your contractions are painful and regular or as instructed by your health care provider. A general guideline of when to call is:

- If you are having your first baby: contractions are every 3 to 5 minutes, and last 60 seconds each for an hour
- If you have given birth before: contractions are every 5 to 7 minutes, and last 60 seconds each for an hour

What is the contact information?

Triage: (734) 764-8134

How do I time my contractions?

- Start at the beginning of one contraction and keep time until the beginning of the next contraction.

What are other reasons to call Triage?

Call if you notice any of the following symptoms:

- Big gush or steady trickle of watery discharge from your vagina (you may have broken your bag of waters)
- Heavy and bright red bleeding like a period. A small amount of red, pink or brown blood or “bloody show” is normal, especially after a vaginal exam.
- Continuous, severe, sharp abdominal pain that doesn’t stop after 3 - 5 minutes
- Absent or decreased fetal movement
- You can’t eat or drink
- You are exhausted
- You can’t cope with the pain
- You are unsure if it is time to come to the hospital.
- With any questions or concerns! Reassurance and information are very important in early labor and we are here for you.

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