

## When should I contact the midwife?

- For latent phase of labour advice.
- If you require pain relief.
- If your contractions are regular (every 2 minutes).
- If your waters break.
- If you have any concerns, such as reduced fetal movements, vaginal bleeding or feel unwell.

If you call the midwife she will have lots of questions for you. So it is best for you to speak to them directly rather than through your birthing partner.



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# The Latent Phase of Labour

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Working out whether you are in the early stages of labour or not, can be very confusing for you. This leaflet has been produced to help you and answer some of your questions. It will also give you lots of suggestions to help you through the early part of your labour.

Remember that every woman's labour is different and sometimes it can take a long time. This is perfectly normal. If you think you are in the early stages of labour, the main thing to remember is to stay calm and relaxed.

### **What is the latent phase of labour?**

The latent phase is the beginning of the first part of your labour. It is a period of time that will not necessarily be continuous and is unique to each individual woman. Some women will have backache or have episodes of contractions that may last a few hours which then stop and start up again the next day. This is perfectly normal. The contractions can be painful. The duration of the latent phase of labour can be variable. It may last for 24 hours or more and can be exhausting for you. It helps if you can stay as relaxed as possible during this part of your labour and remain at home for as long as you can.

### **What is happening during the latent phase of labour?**

Your contractions may feel uncomfortable or painful but they will not be regular. They will stop and start, last for less than 60 seconds and may continue for several hours. This is normal. The neck of the womb (the cervix) has been long and closed during your pregnancy. These first contractions, help to soften the neck of the womb and prepare your body for active labour. As the contractions become closer together, longer and stronger, the neck of the womb will also begin to shorten and then open up. Once the cervix is four centimetres dilated and the contractions are regular (every 2 minutes) and lasting for at least a minute, then labour has become active.

### **How can I help myself?**

There are many ways of helping yourself to cope through the latent phase of labour.

- Keep your breathing deep, steady and slow during a contraction. This will prevent you from using extra energy. Once the contraction is wearing off, close your eyes and allow your body to rest before the next one.
- Take a warm bath or shower, this could help you relax.

- Using a birthing ball can alleviate discomfort and help your baby get into a good position for birth.
- Listen to music or watch a film to keep you calm and relaxed.
- Make sure you eat to ensure you maintain your energy levels. High carbohydrate snacks or meals are best.
- Drink plenty of fluids and make sure you are emptying your bladder regularly.
- You may want to have your birthing partner with you for support during this time. They can give you reassurance to help reduce your anxiety.
- Your birthing partner can also massage your back if needed.
- It is very important to remain upright and adopt different positions, as much as you can between resting.
- If you have a TENS machine you can use this now.
- You could consider using approved alternative therapies.

