

Journey of Birth

Prenatal Education

Labour, Birth
& Recovery

Practical guidance for
pregnancy, labour, birth and the
first weeks with your baby.

In early labour...

Do nothing, if you need nothing. For as long as labour can be ignored, do something else. If it's the middle of the night, go back to sleep or rest.

Planned activities for early labour (suggestions: go out for lunch, to a movie, for a walk, bake a cake, etc).

In active labour...

Stay active as long as possible. Call your care provider when your water ruptures. If birthing in the hospital, plan to head there when contractions are 5-1-1 (every 5 minutes, lasting a minute, consistently for 1 hour).

In transition...

Keep breathing. There is nothing else you need to do but get through each moment.

In pushing...

Follow your own urge to push. Ask for help with positioning and guidance from your care provider for more efficient pushing. When possible, avoid pushing on your back.

Variations on normal labour

- If your labour is progressing very quickly, call your care provider or 911 if you cannot reach your care provider or hospital in time.
- If your labour is slow to progress, aim for enough rest, coupled with activity to encourage labour. Slow labour needs fortitude and patience and encouraging support.

Comfort measures

- Take a bath/shower
- Walking
- Being upright and active
- Hands and knees
- Hand or foot massage
- Changing positions
- Meditation
- Focused breathing
- Hot compress
- Lower back massage
- Distraction
- Partner presence

Planning for Birth

- Prepare good food ahead of time for easy snacks.
- If you're birthing in the hospital, pack extra clothes for mom and partner.
- Bring your toiletries with you.
- Wear something comfortable and loose-fitting in case you'd rather stay in your own clothes rather than a hospital gown.
- Make sure you communicate with any friends, family members, or your doula who you may plan to have there that you could have a change of feeling about their presence as labour progresses.

Pain Medication

Remember that when a labouring mother asks for pain medication, what she is saying is that she feels she cannot cope anymore, and she needs something else to take over the job of coping.

Sometimes, this is pain medication. Other times she needs more active support to refocus her energy. If the goal is to avoid pain medication, try suggesting 5 contractions in a new position, and provide more active, hands-on support if helpful, and then, if she still wants pain medication after trying something new, discuss options with care provider.

Specific instructions from care provider:

Care provider's contact number:

Contact numbers of family/friends in case of emergency:

Recovery

- More calories are needed than during pregnancy. Eat fibre, especially if you've had pain medication which may cause constipation.
- Postpartum bleeding lasts a few weeks—clots larger than a ping pong ball should be reported to your care provider.
- You will bleed more if you are too active—increased bleeding = doing too much activity.
- You can usually resume sexual activity when you personally feel ready. Check with your care provider.
- While you are breastfeeding, it's common not to menstruate for some months. However, you will ovulate before you menstruate, and could become pregnant again.
- Postpartum blues (emotional ups and downs) are very common.
- Postpartum depression sometimes occurs, even without a history of mental health concerns – partners especially can pay attention to changes in mom's overall mood and functioning and seek support as needed.
- Ask your care provider when you can resume gentle exercises.
- Consider seeing a pelvic floor physiotherapist.

Breastfeeding

- The first 24 hours you have colostrum (thick creamy-yellow milk) that is minimal but high in nutrients.
- Your milk will come in on day 2-3, and your breasts may feel engorged.
- You can relieve this discomfort by hand-expressing some milk, having a hot shower, using cold cabbage leafs as a compress.
- Latch! The way your baby comes onto the breast is very important. Your baby should take more than just your nipple into their mouth. Ask a care provider to watch you breastfeed to assess the position of your baby and the latch.
- Babies need to breastfeed 8 to 12 times in a 24-hour period, or every 2 to 3 hours. Some feedings will be brief "snacks" while others will be longer "meals".
- Breastfeeding takes a while to learn, for both mother and baby. You can expect it to take 3-4 weeks to feel like it's becoming smoother and feeling established, and a few more weeks before it is easy.
- Get support early on if you're having troubles—public health, your care provider or a breastfeeding counsellor, lactation consultant or experienced doula can help.

Sleep

- New babies sleep best near you. Health Canada recommends babies sleep in the same room, but on their own sleep surface.
- Babies sleep in short durations, to facilitate frequent feeding and contact, essential for growth and brain development.
- Sleep when your baby sleeps, whenever possible.
- Keep going back to bed until you've had enough sleep.
- Use a carrier if your baby will only sleep in your arms.
- It's okay to nurse your baby to sleep.

Adjustment to Parenthood

- Plan for as much help as you can reasonably receive! Accept all offers of cooked meals. Seek out a postpartum doula if possible, or accept family/friends offers of help around the house.
- Rest as much as possible given your new lack-of-sleep schedule.
- Take turns ensuring you care for yourself—have a quiet cup of tea, visit a friend, go for a walk.
- Day 3 is especially hard—accumulation of minimal sleep, baby usually extra fussy, significant hormone changes for mom. Be gentle with one another.
- Remember that babies change so quickly—what may feel like a very difficult stage this week, can quickly transition into a smoother reality next week.

Remember that **every experience is brand new for your baby**, and they do not see themselves as separate from you physically. Your body is their habitat and they want to be close to you. Babies learn to trust through consistent responsiveness and attunement from their parents.