

# KEEP CALM AND LABOR ON!



*Know what to expect in early labor.*

**OH BABY! YOU JUST HAD YOUR FIRST CONTRACTION. IS THIS IT? SHOULD YOU GRAB YOUR BIRTHING BAG AND HEAD OUT?**

You may be in **early labor** — the phase that comes before **active labor**.

## WHAT'S EARLY LABOR LIKE?

- Contractions are getting stronger and settling into a regular pattern
- As contractions strengthen, you'll need to work harder and find a rhythm
- The cervix dilates to 6 cm to prepare for birth, as the baby moves down in your pelvis<sup>1</sup>
- Early labor is most often the longest phase, more than half of the total labor time

## DID YOU KNOW?



The average length of early labor is **6-12 hours** for first-time parents (early labor is usually shorter for experienced moms).<sup>2</sup>

It may even last **24 hours or more**, which can be perfectly normal

## THERE ARE BENEFITS TO STAYING HOME DURING LABOR AS LONG AS POSSIBLE:



Gives you more **flexibility** to move freely—which can **reduce** the risk of medical interventions<sup>3</sup>



Helps **increase** the labor hormone, oxytocin—which **allows** the cervix to thin and open<sup>4</sup>

## HOW CAN YOUR PARTNER AND DOULA SUPPORT YOU?



Offering comfort, physical care and reassurance



Helping time contractions



Keeping your mind off labor with simple activities, like playing games

## STAY CONNECTED

Resting and relaxing

Drinking plenty of fluids and eating what appeals to you

Going for a short walk

Moving around or changing positions

Focusing on slow, deep breathing

Using a warm pad or ice pack on your lower back

Reading a good book or watching TV

Asking your doula or partner for a gentle massage



## HOW DO I KNOW WHEN TO GO?

Active labor begins when contractions are roughly 3-5 minutes apart, last 1 minute and have been that way for 1-2 hours.<sup>6</sup>

However, listen to your body. If you feel it's time to go to your birthing facility, follow that instinct and/or call your care provider first, especially if your water breaks.

**LEARN MORE ABOUT EARLY LABOR IN A LAMAZE CLASS, IN-PERSON OR ONLINE, SO YOU CAN BE PREPARED! VISIT [LAMAZE.ORG](http://LAMAZE.ORG) TO LEARN MORE.**



1 American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine. Safe prevention of the primary cesarean delivery. Obstetric Care Consensus No. 1. American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists.

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3 Regan, M., McElroy, K., Iobst, S., and Lothian, J. (2015). Optimizing childbirth outcomes through adoption of healthy birth practices.

4 Childbirth Connection. (April 2011). Understanding & Navigating the Maternity Care System. Retrieved from <http://www.childbirthconnection.org/maternity-care/role-of-hormones/>

5 March of Dimes. (May 2014). Vaginal birth - Stages of labor. Retrieved from <http://www.marchofdimes.org/pregnancy/stages-of-labor.aspx>

6 Lothian, J.A., McGrath, K. (2012, April 24). Your step-by-step guide to giving birth. [Web log post]. Retrieved from <http://www.lamaze.org/StagesOfLabor>