

The Latent Phase of Labour

Introduction

Labour is a natural physiological process. It is a unique experience for every woman. No two labours will be the same. We will be here to support you through this special time and to help you achieve the birth you have planned for.

Wherever you are planning to give birth, we are committed to keeping your labour as normal as possible.

Your body will be preparing to give birth, making small changes that will start the journey of labour. We hope this leaflet will help you to understand the process of labour, including the latent phase and help you to make sense of the amazing changes your body is making in the early stages.

Firstly, labour has three stages:

- 1. The First Stage:** when the cervix (neck of the womb) opens to 10 cm.
- 2. The Second Stage:** when the baby moves down through the vagina (birth canal) and is born.
- 3. The Third Stage:** when the placenta (afterbirth) is delivered.

What is the 'latent' phase of labour?

The latent phase is the early part of the first stage of labour. The cervix has been closed for many months keeping your baby safe inside the uterus (womb) until the time comes for it to open to allow for the birth of your baby.

What happens during the latent phase?

The latent phase is difficult to describe as it varies widely amongst individual women in terms of strength and duration. Sometimes the latent phase can lead to early admission to the Birth Centres or Labour Ward. Please be reassured that if labour is still in the early stages, your cervix will still be making lots of positive changes.

Before labour begins, the neck of the womb is long, thick, firm and closed. During the latent phase, this shortens in length and softens. Midwives and doctors refer to this as effacement. During this stage, the cervix can also open up to 3-4cm.

At this time, your body is producing the necessary hormones such as oxytocin for the birth of your baby. The uterus (womb) starts contracting usually irregularly in occurrence, shorter lasting and milder in strength than in active labour whilst your body tries to figure out which muscle fibres to use for labour.

The latent phase can last for several days before active labour starts. This is normal. Some women experience 'period' type cramps and back ache and some will experience short periods of contractions lasting a few hours which may stop and start up again the following day when you have rested.

Remember, the latent phase of labour can last a long time, especially for first time mums. This can be a very tiring time but it is important to remember that your body knows what it is doing and trust that it can and will birth your baby. If you can understand what things can help or hinder the natural process, you can create the right environment around you. You may feel at times that certain things you try appear to slow labour down. This is not the case; it just means that it is not established labour at present, it is normal and it is a good time for yourself and your partner/family to catch up on some rest.

When your body has rested and has built up more energy supplies, your contractions will start again.

If you telephone the midwives for support/advice at this time, following a long chat about what you are experiencing and the coping strategies you may or may not have tried at this point, you may be reassured enough and encouraged to remain at home. Most women are more relaxed at home in the latent phase of labour and being in your own comfortable surroundings at this time can encourage the early release of the natural hormones required to help labour establish. Remember, a 'start-stop' pattern of contractions is common in the latent phase. By finding a peaceful, quiet place where you feel able to safely relax, you will help to increase your levels of your own natural pain relievers called 'endorphins'.

Try to avoid bright lights, the feeling of people watching and judging you and being somewhere you don't feel safe.

It is important to reserve as much energy as you can for when the active phase of labour begins.

Rest as much as you can!

Here are some other things you can do to try and help yourself:

- Pottering round your house and keeping to your normal routine.
- Taking a gentle walk.
- Listening to music of your choice.
- Taking a warm deep bath or shower.
- Taking regular naps and resting.
- Practising relaxation and breathing techniques.
- Massage – ask your partner/supporter to do this for you.
- Heat pack/hot water bottle on lower back/tummy. Ensure not too hot to avoid burning.
- Eating little and often – carbs and sugary foods/drinks for energy.
- Experiment with different positions that help you to feel more comfortable – kneeling, walking or sitting. You could also try sitting on a birthing ball at the side of your bed with your head rested on some pillows so you can rest between contractions.
- Keep room dimly lit and calm.
- Paracetamol is perfectly safe to take in pregnancy (no more than 8 tablets in 24 hours).
- A TENs machine is perfect for this stage of labour, especially if you have lower back discomfort.

Things to monitor when at home

Although the latent phase is a normal part of your labour journey there are some important things to monitor whilst at home.

- If at any point you feel you need to talk to a midwife as you need further support or advice please do not hesitate to contact us. Together with the midwife you can then ensure an appropriate plan is made about ongoing care.
- It is important to continue to monitor your baby's movements throughout the latent phase. If you are concerned about your baby's movements please call Maternity Assessment Unit without delay.
- If you think your waters may have gone or have any bleeding please contact us.
- It is important to rest, eat and drink during the latent phase of labour. If you start feel unwell at any point during your latent phase please contact us for advice.

We hope this leaflet will help in preparing you for your unique labour journey.

If you need further support or advice please call the midwives:

Calderdale Birth Centre	Tel: (01422) 224417
Maternity Assessment Centre	Tel: (01422) 224392
LDRP	Tel: (01422) 222129

If you have any comments about this leaflet or the service you have received you can contact :

Clinical Manager of Birth Centres

Calderdale Birth Centre: (01422) 224417

www.cht.nhs.uk

If you would like this information in another format or language contact the above.

Potřebujete-li tyto informace v jiném formátu nebo jazyce, obraťte se prosím na výše uvedené oddělení

Jeżeli są Państwo zainteresowani otrzymaniem tych informacji w innym formacie lub wersji językowej, prosimy skontaktować się z nami, korzystając z ww. danych kontaktowych

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