

STAGE I / Early or Latent (dilating 0-4cm)

Physical Aspects

- Mild, possibly irregular contractions, felt in front and/or back, 5-39 minutes apart, 30-40 seconds in length. Will progressively get longer, stronger and closer together.
- May have diarrhea.
- Water may break.
- Possible pink vaginal discharge.

Role of Dad and/or Support Person

- Help with timing contractions, relaxation and diversionary activities.
- Help pack bag and transport mother to hospital as instructed.

Emotional Aspects

- Excited and confident.
- Talkative, but somewhat apprehensive.

Social Aspects

- Wants to contact those who will be with her for delivery.
- Timing contractions with support.
- Eat and drink lightly.
- Alternate rest and activity periods.
- Use gravity positive or upright positions as much as possible without exhaustion, use breathing, relaxation, and massage if needed.

STAGE I / Active (dilating 4-7cm)

Physical Aspects

- Regular contractions 2-10 minutes apart, lasting about 60 seconds.
- Increasing back and pelvic pain. Unable to walk during contractions.
- Dry mouth, nausea and/or vomiting and diarrhea may occur.
- Use breathing, relaxation and massage if pain medication is not used or until pain medication is given and working effectively. Sometimes pain medications are less effective than desired.

Emotional Aspects

- Self-focused during contractions.
- Tired and restless; may moan or cry out during contractions. Possibly reevaluating need for pain medication, uncertain of ability to cope with labor.

Social Aspects

- Settle into hospital, get acquainted with staff and surroundings.
- Initially sociable, asking questions, but becoming more serious.
- Desiring companionship.
- Easily upset by interventions.

Role of Dad and/or Support Person

- Help mother get comfortable in hospital.
- Talk to mother between, not during contractions.
- Eat and rest.
- Accept mother's behavior and reassure her with positive affirmations. Praise her coping efforts.
- Encourage position change and hourly urination.

STAGE I / Transition (dilating 8-10cm)

Physical Aspects

- Very strong contractions, 1-3 minutes apart, lasting 50-90 seconds.
- Frequent contractions are double or triple peaking and feeling a premature urge to push is common if pain medication is not used or has worn off.
- Very hot during contractions, very cold between contractions.

- Hiccuping, vomiting, leg cramps and severe backache are common. This is the shortest part of labor, but it is the most intense.

Social Aspects

- Complete self-focus. Wants constant companionship.
- Overwhelmed and needs encouragement to keep from giving up.

STAGE I / Transition (continued)

Emotional Aspects

- Increased irritability, annoyed by small talk in room.
- Unable to concentrate on relaxation and breathing.
- May lose perspective. May tire if labor has been long.

Role of Dad and/or Support Person

- Give counterpressure to lower back.
- Demonstrate breathing so that she can imitate you.
- Remain calm; help her to bed.
- Use eye contact to keep her focused.
- Reassure her that the end is near.
- Stop massaging if she finds it irritating.

STAGE II / Birth (baby pushes into the world)

Physical Aspects

- Contractions spaced further apart, every 2-5 mins, lasting 45-99 seconds.
- Bulging bottom with bloody vaginal discharge.
- Mother seems to get a second wind and usually feels a great relief to push with contractions.
- May feel a burning sensation and may feel pain with pushing if pelvic floor is tense.

Emotional Aspects

- Pushing often feels uncoordinated at first and mother may say, "I can't do this."
- Mothers are generally excited that labor is over, and amazed by the amount of work involved in pushing the baby out.

Social Aspects

- May grunt and groan while pushing.
- Wants dad and/or support person present.
- Mother will lose track of time and surroundings.
- Concentrating only on delivering the baby.

Role of Dad and/or Support Person

- Assist mother into the desired position for pushing.
- Keep encouraging her and keep her abreast of the progress of the baby's descent.
- Remind her to relax her bottom and push without excessive breath holding.
- Birth will be a profoundly moving experience.

STAGE III / Delivery of the placenta

Physical Aspects

- Contractions will temporarily stop.
- Placenta will detach and be pushed out.
- Experience vaginal bleeding, chills, uncontrollable shaking, possible hunger, thirst or exhaustion.
- Uterus should remain firm.
- Start breastfeeding baby.

Role of Dad and/or Support Person

- Absorbed in looking at baby.
- Praise all of mom's efforts.
- Reassure her no apology is needed.
- May be laughing and/or crying.
- Share experiences and feelings.

Emotional Aspects

- Absorbed in looking at baby.
- Feel a sense of accomplishment.
- May be very excited or sleepy.
- May apologize for perceived uncontrolled behavior in labor.
- Anxious about health of baby.

Social Aspects

- Wants a lot of contact with baby.
- Alert, happy talkative. Possibly laughing or crying.
- May be exhausted and sleepy.
- Expresses a sense of great relief.