

Getting ready for birth

This leaflet has been produced to provide help and advice in planning for the birth of your baby. If you have any specific questions or concerns please contact your midwife or GP.

Pack for your labour

Pack a bag well in advance that you can just pick up to take with you when you go into labour. It is also a good idea to let your birth partner know where the bag is kept in case you go into labour away from home. If your birth partner doesn't live with you, it is also important to make sure they have a spare key, so they can get your bag for you.

If you are having a home birth, it is also a good idea to have a list of things ready – your midwife can advise you. You will find a list of things you may need in the CD-ROM given to you at booking.

Other things to bear in mind before the labour

Keep a list of important numbers with you (either in your handbag or make sure you bring your Maternity folder with you as this has many important numbers in the back).

It is also a good idea to plan for after the birth as, for a while, you may be too tired or busy to do normal things like shopping and cooking, so stock up on things like toilet paper, sanitary towels, nappies and tinned or frozen meals.

Work out how you will get to the hospital, as it could be any time of the day or night. If you are using a private car, make sure it is running well and there's enough petrol. If a friend or neighbour has promised to drive you, make sure you have a 'back up' plan in case there is a problem and they are not available. If you haven't got access to a car, use a local reliable taxi service and make sure you call them in plenty of time or your baby may be born on the way to the hospital! If it is an emergency and you do not think you will make it to the hospital in time then call an ambulance.

If you already have children it is also a good idea to make arrangements for what will happen to them when you go into labour and while you are in hospital.

Going into labour – recognising the signs

Labour is different for every woman, and pinpointing when it begins is not really possible. However, when the time really comes, you are unlikely to mistake the signs. If you're truly in labour, one or more of the following things will happen:

- You will experience contractions at regular and increasingly shorter intervals; these will become longer and stronger in intensity.
- You may have persistent lower back pain, often accompanied by a crampy premenstrual feeling.
- You may notice a 'show' (a brownish or blood-tinged mucus discharge). This is the mucus plug that blocks the cervix, so passing it may mean that labour has started. However, the 'show' may appear up to a week before the baby is born so it is not a definite sign unless accompanied by regular contractions. If you lose more blood, it may be a sign that something is wrong, so telephone your hospital straight away.
- Your waters break; these are the fluids that surround the baby in the womb. You will either notice a steady trickle or a sudden gush of water that you can't control. This may happen some time or very soon before the baby is due to be born.
- Some women experience nausea or vomiting.
- Some women also have diarrhoea; it is natural for women to want to empty their bowels before or very early in labour.
- **Please phone the labour line on 0118 322 7304 to speak to a midwife who will be able to help and advise you**

Things you can do to help you prepare

During early labour, it's very important to drink plenty of fluids and that you eat something to give yourself energy – you will probably only want a light snack.

Alternate between walking and resting, or try taking a warm bath or shower to ease any aches and pains. And if you can, try to get some rest to prepare you for the work ahead.

Birth is a natural process so release any fear that could make pain worse and just relax. Practising relaxation helps you to remain calmer and more in control. If you attended antenatal classes, use what you learnt there. Focus on your breathing - alternate nostril breathing can help to keep your mind centred and calm.

If you have hired a Tens machine, make sure that you start using it prior to coming into hospital as it will help you cope with the contractions.

Use your birth partner (don't worry if you don't have one, your midwife will help you) to 'lean on'. Talk to them to keep yourself calm and ask them to massage you or to help you get into a comfortable position.

Labour, particularly a first labour, may last 12-15 hours from the time when the contractions become painful) as your cervix begins to open up more quickly (you may hear this called 'active labour', following on from the 'latent' or quiet phase of labour) so it is important that you keep comfortable, relaxed and have plenty of energy.

When to go into hospital (for those not having a home birth)

If your waters have broken, you will probably be advised to go straight to the hospital, either to the Delivery Suite or to the Rushey Midwifery Led Unit.

If your waters haven't broken, but you are having regular contractions, it may be appropriate for you to wait until they are coming about five minutes apart and each contraction lasts about 60 seconds before getting to the hospital. However, if you live some way from the hospital or it is traffic rush-hour, or this is not your first baby (second babies often arrive more quickly), go sooner to make sure you have plenty of time to get there.

Please call 0118 322 7304 for advice if you feel you are in labour or before leaving home and don't forget to bring your overnight bag, your notes and your birth plan with you.

For those having a home birth

Follow the procedure you have agreed with your midwife during your discussions about the onset of labour.

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