

Understanding Labour and Childbirth

Bringing a baby into the world is a big moment, and knowing what to expect can help you feel more prepared and confident. Here's what you need to know about labour, pain relief, and common interventions.

How Do I Know Labour Has Started?

Here are the signs that labour might be beginning:


1. **The 'Show'** – You may notice a pink or bloody mucous discharge. This is a sign your cervix is starting to open.
 2. **Contractions** – At first, these might be irregular. Over time, they become more **frequent, stronger, and closer together**.
 3. **Back Pain** – Some women feel a dull ache or cramps in the lower back.
 4. **Waters Breaking** – This is when the **amniotic sac ruptures**, and fluid leaks from the vagina. It can be a small trickle or a gush.
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The 3 Stages of Labour

1 ☐ First Stage

Regular contractions begin, and your cervix starts to **thin (efface)** and **open (dilate)** to 10 cm.

2 ☐ Second Stage






Time to push! This stage begins once the cervix is fully dilated and ends with the **birth of your baby** .


3 ☐ Third Stage


After your baby is born, you'll deliver the **placenta**. Often, an injection is given to help your uterus contract and **reduce bleeding**.

Pain Relief Options During Labour

There are **many ways to manage pain** in labour, including both natural and medical options. These include:

-  **Relaxation techniques**
-  **Heat packs**
-  **Massage**
-  **TENS machine**
-  **Nitrous oxide (laughing gas)**

 **Medications** – such as **pethidine or morphine**

 **Epidural** – a local anaesthetic that numbs the lower body

Your doctor or midwife will help you choose the **right pain relief** depending on your preferences and the stage of labour.

Monitoring Your Baby During Labour

Labour can put pressure on your baby, especially during contractions. To make sure your baby is coping well:

- ✓ The **heartbeat is checked regularly**, usually every 30 minutes
 - ✓ As labour progresses, checks may happen more often
 - ✓ In some cases, **continuous monitoring** is recommended
 - ✓ A small device called a **fetal scalp electrode** may be used to get a clearer heartbeat reading – it's safe in most cases
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Interventions That May Be Used During Labour

Sometimes labour needs a little help. Here's what might happen:

Inducing Labour

If labour hasn't started on its own, it can be **induced**. This may involve:


- ◆ A vaginal exam
- ◆ Breaking the waters (artificial rupture)
- ◆ Hormone gel or drip to start contractions


Augmenting Labour

If labour begins but **progress is slow**, similar steps may be used to speed things up (e.g. breaking the waters or giving hormones).

If Baby Is in Distress

If the baby's heartbeat shows signs of stress:

 Additional monitoring or testing may be done

 If needed, your doctor may recommend an **assisted birth** using:

- **Vacuum (ventouse)**
 - **Forceps**
 - **Emergency C-section**
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Final Thoughts

Every birth is different, and your care team is there to **support and guide you** through every stage. If you have any questions or preferences, speak with your doctor or midwife so you feel confident and informed about your birth plan.