

# Early labour:

## A normal part of the birthing process



### What is early labour?

Early labour is when irregular contractions begin to occur, and your cervix softens, shortens and prepares to open. It can last from several hours to several days, and may start and stop several times. This is a normal part of the birthing process. Staying home during early labour has many benefits and can help you to progress in labour. Always seek help from your health care provider and hospital as needed.



### What does early labour feel like?

- Contractions are mild to moderate, they may vary in length and are at irregular pattern
- You may have backache or cramping
- You may have pinkish mucousy vaginal discharge, which is known as "bloody show"
- Your waters may break in a gush or slow leak
- You may have an upset stomach, or diarrhea
- You may have difficulty sleeping or feel emotional
- As you become closer to active labour, your contractions will become more regular



### What can I do if I need more help coping with contractions?

- Call your doula (if you have one) and have your partner or support person stay with you
- Call your midwife or doctor (ask them ahead of time how to reach them outside of office hours)
- Call your hospital's birthing unit and speak to one of the nurses
- Visit the hospital for assessment, information, and support. After an assessment and talking to your doctor, midwife, or nurse about an early labour plan, the health care staff may advise you to return to the comfort of your home until active labour starts.



### What are the benefits of staying at home during early labour?

- **Comfort and Familiarity:**  
Being in a familiar environment can help you feel more relaxed and comfortable.
- **Freedom of Movement:**  
At home, you can move around, change positions, and use your space as needed.
- **Access to Comfort Measures:**  
You can use your own bed, shower, or bath, and have access to your preferred snacks and drinks.
- **Emotional Support:**  
You can be surrounded by loved ones and use your own relaxation techniques to stay calm.
- **Listen to your body:**  
Don't be too focused on timing of contractions in early labour.
- **Distractions:**  
Try music, movies, massage, baking, going for walk or whatever else you enjoy.



### Call your doctor, midwife, or the hospital's birthing unit if:

- Your contractions are much stronger, closer together, and have a regular pattern
- You are no longer coping with your contractions at home
- You feel like pushing or bearing down with each contraction
- You think your water has broken
- You have vaginal bleeding (more than a small amount of mucousy blood)
- You have noticed that your baby is moving much less than normal
- You have a fever of 38°C (100.4°F) or higher

**Your midwife or doctor will provide you with information that is appropriate for you — rely on the information or plan that you had discussed in your prenatal visits.**

**Call your midwife, doctor or nearest birthing unit to help you decide when it's time to go to the hospital if you are unsure.**

## Example labour positions



**Standing**



**Birthing ball**



**Sitting upright**



**Kneeling**



**Semi-sitting**



**Side-lying**