



## Maternity Unit

# Latent Phase of Labour

This information leaflet has been written to help you recognise some of the signs and symptoms you may experience at the start of labour. It offers you some advice and tips to help you through the early first stage of labour, also referred to as the 'latent phase'.

### What is the latent phase of labour?

The latent phase is the early part of the first stage of labour. It is the part where the neck of the womb thins and opens (dilates) up to 3-4cms.

You may be experiencing contractions, but they are often irregular, short lasting and not quite as painful as when you are in the active stage of labour.

### What to expect during the latent phase

Some women have a very quick latent phase, but it typically lasts between 4 and 24 hours. For some women it may last for several days. Some women may experience backache or cramps. Others have bouts of contractions that last for several hours, which then stop and start up again the next day. **This is normal.**

If your contractions stop, it is a good time to rest and make sure you have something to eat and drink. Your contractions will start again when your body has built up some energy stores.

### What can I do in the latent phase?

It is a good idea for you to stay at home for as long as you feel comfortable. You are more likely to remain relaxed in your own home. There is evidence to suggest that the further on in labour you are when you come into hospital, the more likely you are to have a normal birth.

### Things you can do to help yourself:

- Perform normal activities.
- Go for a walk.
- Have a warm shower or bath.
- Distract yourself by listening to music, watching television or DVDs.

- Use a TENS machine when becoming more uncomfortable. (These can be hired locally).
- Focus on breathing techniques and relaxation.
- Try different positions and use a birthing ball.
- Use a hot water bottle.
- Try massage and back rubbing, especially for backache.
- Try to sleep, rest or nap.
- Keep well hydrated.
- Eat well at this stage in order to maintain energy levels throughout labour, particularly foods containing carbohydrates.
- Monitor foetal movements.

## **Progressing from the Latent Phase to Established Labour**

It is not possible to say exactly when active labour will start, so try to stay as relaxed as you can and distract yourself from focussing only on the contractions. Labour is different for everyone. The following signs are a guide to when you are moving into 'established' labour: (If you are not sure, then ring and speak to a midwife).

- Consider how often the pain is coming, where you are feeling it, how long it lasts, how strong it is and whether you are coping with it.
- As labour progresses, the contractions will get closer together, eventually coming every few minutes and gradually becoming more painful, reaching a peak and then subsiding again until they go away. You may notice that these are different from previous latent phase contractions.
- When you are in strong labour, you will probably have to stop what you are doing and concentrate to get through the pain. You will probably not be able to talk through labour contractions.
- You may find the things that have been helping you to cope at home are no longer enough and you will instinctively feel that you want to be in the place where your baby will be born.
- You may experience more 'show'. This is normal and is generally a good sign that things are progressing. It should still not soak through a sanitary towel and, if this happens, it is important to ring the hospital straight away.

Choose a supportive birthing partner who can be with you throughout your labour. They can encourage and reassure you and help to tell your midwife what you would like. They can help with things such as:

- Massage.
- Keeping you active.
- Getting you drinks.
- Praising and encouraging you.
- Giving you cuddles.
- Reminding you to go to the toilet regularly.
- Keeping you company, and even trying to make you laugh!

You can telephone the Maternity Unit at any time if you have concerns about what is happening, or if you need some reassurance.

You should always telephone Labourline or the Maternity Unit if you think your waters have broken or if you have any bleeding from your vagina, if you are worried about your baby's movements, or if your contractions have become longer, stronger and closer together.

## Contact Numbers:

We hope that you have found this information useful. If you have any questions or are worried about anything, please speak to the following Dorset County Hospital Staff:

Labourline	03003690388 (Freephone)
Maternity Unit	01305 254267

## Useful Websites:

[www.labourpains.com](http://www.labourpains.com)

[www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

[www.nct.org.uk](http://www.nct.org.uk)

## About this leaflet:

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If you have any feedback regarding the accuracy of the information contained in this leaflet, or if you would like a list of references used to develop this leaflet, please email [pals@dchft.nhs.uk](mailto:pals@dchft.nhs.uk)



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