

So you're going to be a birth partner.



An overview on what is going on and how to be helpful in the birth room.

(Spoiler alert: sitting in the chair on your phone eating popcorn is not the answer)

Labor Basics & What to Expect

1st stage of labor: Early labor

Early labor is when labor is beginning. The cervix dilates from 0-5 centimeters. Contractions may be around every 5-15 minutes. In this stage your partner is usually able to talk through contractions, is in a lighter mood, laughing, talking, and resting. This is also usually the longest part of labor, on average it's about 6-12 hours. Contractions will gradually get stronger & more intense and closer together.

Remind your partner to **REST** and relax in the early parts, there is a long journey ahead that will require a lot more energy. Remind them to take slow deep breaths through contractions, and move positions often.

Things to suggest to your partner:

- Take a easy slow walk
- Take a warm relaxing shower
- Try laying down/napping
- Offer a relaxing back or foot massage
- Set the mood: dim the lights, play relaxing music

What you can do: Get the bags ready and in the car for when it's time to go to the hospital/birth center. Offer light snacks & water to your partner and remind them to frequently empty their bladder

1st stage of labor: Active labor

Active labor is when it's getting more serious. This is when the cervix dilates from 6-10cm. During active labor your partner will not be talking during contractions, may go inward and solely focus on breathing through contractions. This is NOT the time for commentary & jokes. Contractions are now every 2-4 minutes and very intense.

What to expect: Your partner may be vocalizing/moaning/groaning during contractions, be more blunt telling you when they do and do not need, cursing, nausea & vomiting, uncontrollable shaking “the labor shakes”, urge to push

Things to do:

- Follow their lead: some people like to be touched, some want to be left alone
- Say positive affirmations & sayings listed below
- Massage their shoulders or back
- Counter pressure on their lower back during a contraction
- Squeezing their hips during a contraction
- Remind them to RELAX their jaw, face, shoulders, their whole body

TRANSITION is the the stage right before pushing. Transition is the hardest and shortest part of labor. Your partner may be yelling and freaking out. Saying things like “ I can’t do this” “Get this baby out of me.” The best thing you can do is to try to keep them calm, saying supportive sayings, and following their lead.

*Epidural Info

Epidural is a type of anesthesia that numbs from top of belly to your feet. It is a tiny flexible tube that is placed in the lower back and medicine to numb the nerves is continuously run through the tube. Typically after an epidural is placed your partner will be stuck in bed, receive a catheter (because they now can’t get up to pee), however will not be able to feel the pain of their contractions anymore- YAY!

If your partner has a well working epidural they may not go through all the “active labor” & “transition” things I listed above.

Common side effects of an epidural:

- Temporarily lowers blood pressure
- Nausea/Vomiting
- Itching
- Shaking
- It’s also NOT a guarantee of pain elimination, sometimes they do not work or are one sided. So it’s still important to know the above information about active labor & transition

Things to do when your partner has an epidural:

- **REST!!!** Both of you need to rest/ take a nap if possible
- Remind your partner of how strong and capable they are
- Keep the room set up for relaxation: dim the lights, play relaxing music, massage her feet or hands, ask the nurses for some essential oils

2nd stage: Birth

It's time to push! Pushing can last anywhere from a couple minutes to 4 hours! If it is your partner's first baby be aware pushing can take some time.

The nurse may be the only one in the room pushing with your partner, and once baby is close to birth that's when the whole room will get filled with people for the birth: your labor nurse, a baby nurse, the doctor or midwife, an OB tech, and possibly a NICU team if it's a high risk birth.

Things you can do:

- Offer sips of water between pushes
- Fan your partner: pushing can make them HOT
- Put wet cold washcloths on their head, neck, or chest
- Offer your supportive words
- Help hold their leg or hands or whatever they need supported!

3rd Stage: Placenta

Baby is here! Typically baby goes right up on your partner's chest and stays there for at least an hour. During this hour is when baby will be skin to skin and have their first feeding.

- Try to remember to take pictures and videos- this is a time in your life that you will want captured!

Within the first 30 minutes after birth of baby is then when the placenta detaches from the uterus and your partner will gently push it out. The doctor or midwife will examine their bottom and sew up any tearing with stitches.

Supportive sayings

Here are some supportive and encouraging things to say during labor & birth:

- "You're doing amazing. I'm so proud of you."
- "I'm right here with you."
- "I believe in you."
- "Breathe with me."
- "Your body knows what to do. Trust in yourself."
- "Each contraction brings us closer to meeting our baby."
- "I see your strength, you are so strong"
- "You can do anything for one minute"
- "You are safe, baby is safe."

Quick and simple do's & don'ts in labor

Dos	Don'ts
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Be Present: Stay by your partner's side offering physical and emotional support.● Follow Your Partner's Lead: Everyone's preferences and comfort levels are different. Follow your partner's cues and wishes.● Advocate: Help communicate your partner's birth plan to the medical team if necessary, ensuring wishes are respected.● Provide Comfort: Offer words of encouragement and comfort.● Stay Calm: Remain calm and composed, even in intense situations. Your presence should provide stability and support.● Offer Physical Comfort: Assist with positioning, massage, and other comfort measures.● Stay Informed: Understand the stages of labor and the medical procedures involved so you can provide informed support.● Hydration and Snacks: Keep your partner hydrated and provide snacks when appropriate.● Capture the Moment: Take photos or videos to document the birth experience, but make sure to respect your partner's wishes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Don't Overwhelm Your Partner: Be mindful of the environment in the room. <u>Avoid overcrowding</u> or introducing unnecessary stressors. <i>You are the birth room bouncer.</i><ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Keep the room RELAXING: dim the lights, low sounds, relaxing music, essential oils. Labor progresses better in safe & calm environments● Don't Be Negative: Avoid expressing negativity or anxiety that could increase your partner's stress levels.● Don't Complain: Refrain from complaining about your own discomfort or tiredness.● Don't Be Absent: Unless explicitly requested, try not to leave the room for extended periods.● Don't Be Disengaged: Avoid being on your phone or distracted during critical moments. Your presence is <u>essential</u>.● Don't Forget to Be Flexible: Birth plans may change due to medical reasons. Stay adaptable and supportive.● Don't Be Overbearing: Respect your partner's space and choices. Let them guide the level of support they need.

Birth Partner Hospital Bag Checklist

- Changes of clothes for 2-3 days
- Toiletries you'd bring for an overnight stay
- Sandals for hospital shower
- Your own pillow & blanket (the hospital ones suck)
- Snacks & water bottle
- Phone Charger (long)
- Laptop, Phone, Book, or fire stick/roku for entertainment (there will be lots of downtime)
- Gum (so you don't have bad breath while your loved one is in labor)
- Eye mask (to help you sleep)

Remember to use your "BRAIN"

This is a special moment in your life. The healthcare team is here to help teach & guide you through birth and postpartum but **YOU** are the one who knows your loved one and baby the best. You and your partner have the power. Speak up & ask questions if you are confused or something doesn't seem right.

Benefits : what are the **benefits** of making this decision?

Risks : what are the **risks**?

Alternative : is there an **alternative**?

Intuition: What is my **intuition**/ gut telling me?

Nothing : what happens if we do **nothing**? (or **wait** 1 hour and reassess)

When it comes to making decisions during birth & postpartum you can always ask for time and space to discuss privately. You can decline anything in healthcare (even if it's policy... policy does not equal the law). Remember that the healthcare workers are people too- we hopefully should not be scary. Ask us any clarifying questions until you feel satisfied with your options and choices.

Labor Positions

You can use these positions at home or in the hospital. As silly as it sounds- I suggest practicing them BEFORE labor starts so you are both used to the positioning, and that you know the placement for the counter pressure & hip squeezes like the back of your hand. Listen to your partner, their body & baby will intuitively tell them how to move and what positions feel good.



“The middle school sway dance”



Supported Standing



Supported Standing Squat



Supported Sitting Squat



Birth ball with leaned over support



Sitting backwards on chair, rubbing partner’s back or putting pressure on tailbone



Counter pressure: steady, strong force applied to one spot on the lower back during contractions using the heel of the hand



Double Hip squeeze: Place your hands along their hips, fingertips on the top of the hipbones. Using your palms, apply pressure up and in. Your palms should be on the fleshy circle of muscle, not on any bone.



Putting it all together: have partner on hands & knees over birth ball while you are alternating between massage, counter pressure, and hip squeezes... whatever they prefer!

I'm confident you are going to be a great birth partner.

Birth can be messy, loud, raw, smelly, and sweaty. But it can also be magical, inspiring, and beautiful. You are about to watch your loved one be incredibly strong and brave as they go through this incredible process. Buckle up, parenthood is a wild ride!

Follow me for more tips: [@mackenzie.on.motherhood](https://www.instagram.com/mackenzie.on.motherhood)

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