

*Approvals:*  
*Maternity Guidelines Group: V1 November 2010, V2 Dec 2013 & Apr 2014, V3 Sep 2018*  
*Divisional Board: V1 Dec 2010, V2 Apr 2013, V3 Sep 2018*  
*Clinical Guidelines Subgroup: V1 Jun 2011, V2 not required*  
*MSLC/BMV: V1 November 2010, V2 Mar 2014, V3 Dec 2018*  
*Equality Impact Assessment: V1 May 2011, V3 Aug 2018*  
*Patient Experience Group: V1 Aug 2011, V2 Jun 2014, V3 Apr 2019*

## Division of Women, Children & Sexual Health Services

### How can I help to reduce Healthcare Associated Infections?

Infection control is important to the wellbeing of our patients, and for that reason we have infection control procedures in place. Keeping your hands clean is an effective way of preventing the spread of infections. We ask that you, and anyone visiting you, use the hand sanitiser available at the main entrance of the hospital and at the entrance to every clinical area before coming into and after leaving the clinical area or hospital. In some situations hands may need to be washed at the sink using soap and water rather than using the hand sanitiser. Staff will let you know if this is the case.

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If you require a translation of this leaflet please contact the Labour Ward or Birth Centre

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# My labour is beginning

This leaflet has been written to help you and your partner understand what is happening to you in the early/latent phase of labour, with advice about how to cope during this period of time

### Patient Information Leaflet

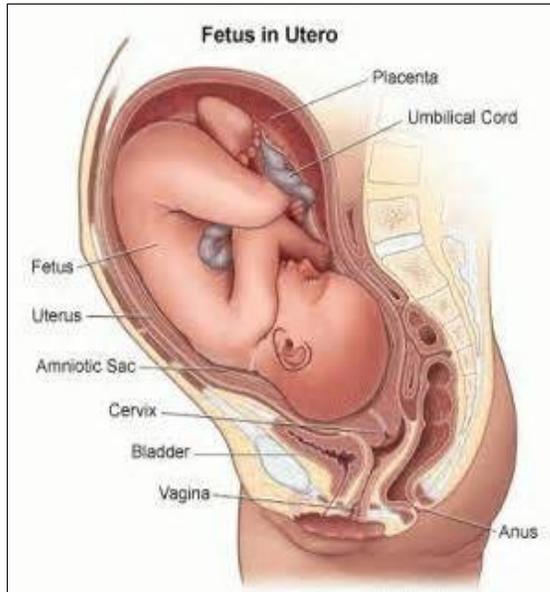
If you want this leaflet in another language please call your community midwife

Safe & compassionate care,

every time

## What is the early / latent phase of labour?

Every woman's experience of early labour is different. Early labour (the latent phase) prepares the womb (uterus), neck of the womb (cervix) and baby for birth.



## What happens in the latent phase of labour?

Before labour starts, the neck of the womb (the cervix) is long, firm and closed.

During the early / latent phase of labour the neck of your womb is softening, thinning and drawing up.

During this stage you may:

- lose your mucous plug (known as a 'show')
- experience your waters breaking (rupture of the membranes)
- experience painful contractions that last for a few hours which then stop and start again the next day
- experience backache or pain very low down in the abdomen, tops of the legs or pelvic area

- discussing with you the signs of labour you are experiencing
- checking your blood pressure, temperature and pulse
- testing your urine sample
- Feeling your tummy (abdomen) to check the way your baby is lying
- measuring your tummy (abdomen) to estimate your baby's growth
- listening to baby's heartbeat
- a vaginal examination may be offered

Following the assessment a plan of care will be made with you.

Sometimes if labour is still in the early stages it may be recommended that you return home to await more established labour. If this happens you will be advised to contact the Birth Centre or Labour Ward at any time for further advice or when you feel you wish to return. For some women, it may be appropriate to remain in hospital on the antenatal ward to wait for labour to establish.

We continually strive to improve the quality of information given to patients. If you have any comments or suggestions regarding this information booklet, please contact :

Head of Midwifery  
Buckinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust  
Stoke Mandeville Hospital  
Mandeville Road  
Aylesbury  
Buckinghamshire  
HP21 8AL

### Other helpful tips for latent phase:

- A supportive companion can help you to feel relaxed in the early stages of labour
- It can be helpful to rest at this stage to conserve energy for the later stages of labour
- Vary your periods of exercise with periods of rest, getting as much rest as possible
- If the contractions are keeping you awake at night, sleep at other times as much as you can to help you keep your energy for the rest of your labour
- Make your environment as comfortable as possible (eg comfortable room temperature, lighting, furnishings)

### For advice/support

Get in touch with your Labour Ward/Birth Centre:

Wycombe Birth Centre	01494 425513/425520
Aylesbury Birth Centre	01296 316103
Labour Ward	01296 316103

### Phone the Birth Centre or Labour Ward immediately if:

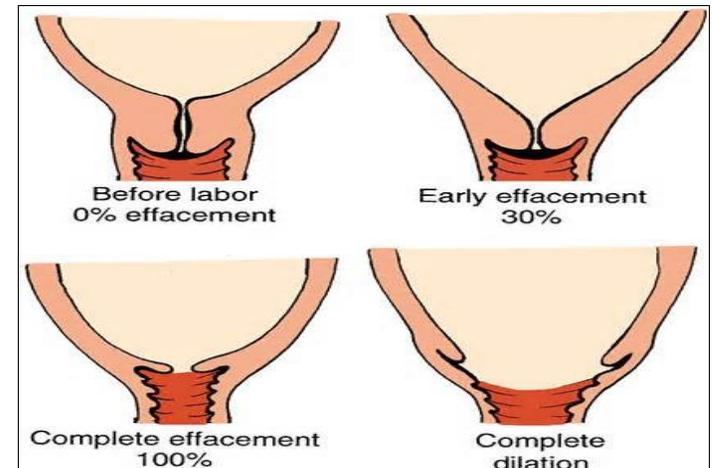
- your waters break
- you are concerned that your baby is not moving as much as it was
- you have any bleeding from your vagina
- you feel unwell

### What happens if I go to the Birth Centre or hospital in early labour?

When you contact the Birth Centre or Labour Ward in early labour, you may be advised to continue self care in early stages of labour or you may be advised to come in for assessment.

The assessment will include:

### How your cervix changes during labour



### How long will the early / latent phase last?

The duration of the early / latent phase is not predictable. It can last several days, and may happen weeks before active labour starts. In the latent phase contractions can start and stop. This is normal. Contractions may continue for several hours but not become longer and stronger. This is normal too.

**Remember that the latent phase can last a long time, especially for first time mums.**

### What can I do to help myself in the latent phase?

Try and stay as relaxed as you can and try not to think about every contraction.

You may find it helpful to:

- take a walk
- watch TV/DVD
- listen to music
- have a nap
- play a board/computer game

## How do I manage the discomfort of the contractions in the latent phase of labour?

You could try:

- asking your partner or labour supporter to give you a massage
- changing between putting a hot water bottle on any areas that ache (wrap it in a towel first) and putting a cool sports injury pack on any areas that ache
- Keep moving, gentle stretches and positions, as shown in the pictures opposite
- trying different positions for comfort (a birthing ball may help)
- using a TENS machine if you have hired one
- using a relaxation or breathing technique

## Can I eat and drink in latent phase of labour?

It is important to eat and drink normally during early/latent phase of labour to keep your strength and energy levels high. Eating little and often can be helpful.

Complex carbohydrates (eg bananas, pasta, baked beans, potato) are especially good as they will provide you with plenty of energy reserves.

Make sure you drink plenty of fluids, especially water, juices and sports drinks.

Remember to go to the toilet to empty your bladder regularly.

## You might find these positions helpful in early labour

