



MELBOURNE

Pregnancy &
Pelvic Physio



Labour & Birth

Labour Pain

- Pain is a sensation that is created by our brain by interpreting different signals in our body, telling us what we are feeling. Everyday pain is our body's warning signal to help protect us from danger. When we do feel pain, it is a natural reaction to 'fight' the pain. In doing so, people may tense their muscles, hold their breath or yell during pain and release the hormone 'Adrenaline'.
- As pain is created in the brain, our environment and thoughts can alter the perception of pain. Being informed, excited and confident about what is happening during the labour and birth process can help to reduce and manage the pain experience. Setting up a calm and familiar birth environment can also help to control pain perception.
- It is important to remember that the pain in labour is a healthy physiological pain and a sign that your body is working hard to birth your baby. The pain in labour is due to the muscles of your uterus contracting repeatedly to open your cervix and to help push your baby out. It might be helpful to think of this as similar to when athletes are reaching peak performance levels during training or competition and will experience pain due to their level of exertion - which is also a 'healthy' pain.

Hormones in Labour:

Hormones play a really important role in the progression of labour and in delivery. Three of the key hormones involved are:

- **Oxytocin:** Known as the hormone of love, oxytocin is secreted during sex, after ovulation and during labour, birth and breastfeeding. It creates nurturing and loving feelings. Its main function in labour is to bring on contractions. Oxytocin reduces stress, calms you down and helps with pain during labour. You'll get a surge of oxytocin in the final stage, so if you're having a vaginal birth it will help you with pushing.
- **Endorphins:** Endorphins are produced in response to pain and stress. Endorphins have calming and pain-relieving effects. As labour progresses and pain intensifies, endorphin levels steadily increase in unmedicated labours.
- **Adrenaline:** Adrenaline is also known as the 'fight or flight' hormone. Adrenaline is secreted in response to stress, fear and extreme pain. If a woman experiences these feelings during labour, too much adrenaline may be produced which can inhibit oxytocin and slow labour progress.



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Labour and Birth Cont

Stages of Labour

First Stage:

The first stage of labour is when your cervix is gradually opening and your baby is moving towards the birth canal. On average, for a first baby, this stage may last for 12-14 hours. Oxytocin is important during this stage.

Pain management strategies for the first stage of labour:

- **Movement**

Commonly, pain during early labour is felt across the lower back, abdominals or pelvis.

By moving your body in labour, you can help to remove the excess adrenaline produced. Moving your arms and legs can also help to distract your brain from the labour pain. You can try rhythmical movements like pelvic tilting, swaying, stamping your feet, wall sliding or even tapping your hands on your thighs during contractions. It is also important to rest as much as you are able.

- **Vocalisation**

Groaning, sighing or humming can help you to avoid holding your breath during labour and will help prevent you to keep your muscles relaxed, particularly your pelvic floor.

- **Breathing**

Breathing in brings oxygen into your body and breathing out with remove the carbon dioxide from your body, along with the reducing tension in your muscles During contractions, your breathing may become faster towards the peak or a contraction and it can be helpful to count your breaths and focus on getting air in and out. When the contraction ends, bring your breathing back to a comfortable pace.

- **Massage**

This can help you feel supported by your birth partner in labour and can help reduce the stress and tension in your body during contractions. The warmth and touch created by massage can also provide a distraction from the pain and can help release oxytocin to help the labour progress.

You can direct your birth partner to focus the massage across your lower back, pelvis, shoulders or wherever you feel comfortable.

- **Visualisation**

Focusing on a picture, person or image that is special to you can help bring your attention to something associated with positive emotions. This in turn can help distract your brain from the labour pain and maintain oxytocin production. You may like to use empowering images like picturing your cervix opening and the baby moving down or even the use of a shower, washing away the tension in your body.



Labour and Birth Cont

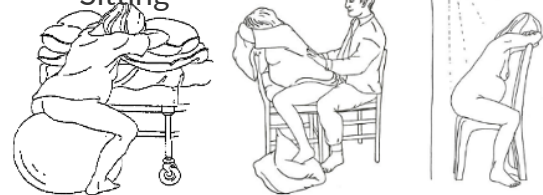
Positions for first stage of labour:

- You can use these positions to move through contractions or when you are tired, you may try using these positions to rest

Standing



Sitting



Kneeling



Lying



Pain Management First Stage Continued:

Stress Balls

Squeeze the stress balls to match the level of pain. Your hands contain many sensory nerves so using them for this purpose can be a powerful distraction during contractions.

Focus on the colour of the stress ball and the sounds that banging the balls make.

Try using rhythmic moves when banging the balls and you may sync this with your breathing as well.

TENS machine

The TENS machine sends small electrical impulses to the skin and tissues of the lower back area which can help your brain focus on another sensation apart from the labour pain.

There are a number of other factors that may contribute to the pain relief offered by a TENS machine. These include:

- TENS pulses release natural feel-good substances called endorphins.
- It helps you feel in control of labour and feel less anxious

Hire your TENS machine from reception from 35 weeks!

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Second Stage of Labour:

The second stage of labour is the time between your cervix being fully dilated and your baby being born. This may be known as the 'pushing' phase and may take up to 1-2 hours (often shorter if you have had a baby before).

When the urge to push arrives it can be overwhelming.

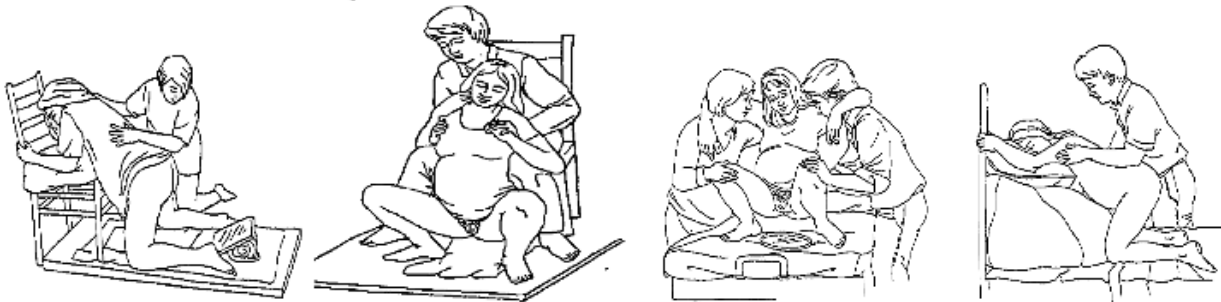
Aside from the urge to push, you are likely to feel:

- pressure, and a strong urge to do a poo
- stretching and burning in your vagina
- the baby's head moving down.

The best thing you can do during this phase is to try and breathe deeply, relax and follow your body's urge to push. Your midwife or birth attendant will guide you.

Positions for second stage of labour:

It's important to try different positions to see what is comfortable for you. Your Midwife or birth attendant may be able to suggest positions that work well. It can be beneficial to find a position that is upright using gravity and leaning forwards to open your pelvic outlet. Here are some



There are many tools available to help with positioning during labour and delivery.

Some useful ones include:

- Gym ball
- Peanut ball
- Bolster
- Soft floor mat
- Pillows
- Bed mechanics

You can practice the positions for Stage 1 and 2 prior to birth to get an idea of what you find comfortable and how you might use props.