

Latent labour is the early first stage of labour and does an important job preparing your body for the active stages of labour that will follow.

What is the cervix?

The cervix is the neck of the womb and when you are pregnant it is long and closed to keep your baby safe inside your womb until you are 37-41 weeks pregnant. The cervix lies at the top of your vagina and can be felt by your midwife or doctor when you are in labour or early labour if they do an internal examination. This helps us to know if labour is starting.



This cervix is long and closed

This cervix is thinning

This cervix is thin and beginning to open

To understand the latent stage of labour it is important to know what the different stages of labour are.

What is latent labour?

Latent labour is the early first stage of thinning and opening your cervix. The muscles of the womb contract making the cervix soft and thin. When it has become thin enough it will begin to open.

What are the active stages of labour?

The **active first stage** of labour is when your cervix is four to five centimetres open and your contractions are painful and regular. This means they are happening every three to five minutes and each one lasting for a minute. The baby's head is being pushed down onto the cervix during the contractions helping it to open to ten centimetres. The **second stage** of labour is when your cervix is fully open to ten centimetres and the contractions

push your baby down the birth canal and baby is born.

The **third stage** of labour is when the placenta/whenua is delivered.

How does the latent labour begin?

Latent labour is different for everyone and can include the following signs:

- Period like cramps in your tummy
- Lower back pain
- Runny bowel motions
- A trickle or gush of water as the bag of waters (membranes) around the baby breaks. The colour of the water should be clear
- As the cervix thins the mucous plug may drop out. You may see this as a jelly like discharge (that may be streaked pink or brown). This may occur a couple of days before labour begins
- Contractions start. They will come and go at different intervals. You may wish to record how frequently the contractions are coming by writing down on a piece of paper the time at the beginning of each contraction. This will give you an idea of how often the contractions are coming. Contractions usually start 15-20 minutes apart and last for 20-60 seconds. The contractions should be mild enough for you to walk around, be able to talk through the contraction and you should be able to continue with light activities

When should I contact the hospital?

If you have been told that your pregnancy has any complications or risk factors you should contact your midwife to discuss what you are experiencing. If you are being cared for by the Community Midwifery Team the hospital midwives are always available by phone.

You can ring (04) 8060 850 to discuss any questions you may have about labour. The midwife will ask

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you some questions to see if you should come in for an assessment or can stay at home.

What questions will the midwives ask?

- When is your baby due?
- Is this your first pregnancy?
- Have you had any problems in this pregnancy for you or your baby?
- Have you seen a midwife or doctor regularly during your pregnancy?
- Do you take any medicines?
- When did labour begin?
- How often are your contractions coming?
- How long are the contractions lasting?
- Have you noticed any loss from your vagina?
- Have your waters broken?
- How much your baby has been moving?

After talking to the midwife you may be asked to come into the hospital for an assessment, but if labour has not established you may be asked to return home to await stronger contractions.

When must I ring the hospital immediately? (04) 8060 850

- Ring the hospital midwife when your waters break, the water should be clear. It is a good idea at this time to put a sanitary pad on. If the water has a greenish colour or has an unpleasant smell it is very important you come to hospital straight away
- If you have any fresh red bleeding from the vagina
- If it is 3 weeks before your baby is due
- If you have concerns about how often your baby is moving
- If you are feeling unwell

What will happen when I go to hospital?

On arrival you will be greeted by a midwife and shown to a room. The midwife will do a number of assessments to check that you and your baby are well. These include checking your blood pressure,

pulse, temperature and testing your urine, exactly the same tests as you have at an antenatal visit.

The midwife will feel your abdomen and discuss the options available for monitoring/listening of baby's heartrate with you on arrival.

Options for monitoring/listening to baby's heart rate are:

- Listening to baby's heartbeat intermittently with use of a Sonicaid: There is no proof that having a cardiotocograph (CTG) is necessary if you and your baby have been well during the pregnancy and the latent phase.
- If there have been any concerns for you or your baby during your pregnancy or while in the latent phase, the midwife will discuss with you about doing a (CTG). This is a machine we use to listen to and record your baby's heart rate for about 20 minutes to check your baby is well.

The midwife will sit beside you with her hand on your tummy to feel how often your contractions are coming and how strong they are. The midwife may do an internal examination to feel if there has been any change in your cervix.

What will happen after my assessment?

After the assessment of you and your baby the midwife will discuss the results with you and together you will make a plan.

What plans may be made for me?

The plan may be for you to return home to get into active labour in your own home. The midwife will give you a clear plan to follow at home and you may need to return for an assessment the next day.

If you are in latent labour home is usually the best place to be. In some cases we will admit you to hospital after your assessment.

What can I do at home?

- Support is really important; ask family and /or friends to help you through this time.
- Try relaxing in a warm bath or have a warm shower.
- Listen to music/television/DVD to help relax

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- Go for a walk with a friend, walking can help your baby get into a good position for labour.
- Continue on with light activities.
- Eat and drink to keep your energy up.
- Try to nap, use a hot water bottle on areas that are uncomfortable.
- Make sure you have someone ready to look after your other children and to bring you back to hospital if you require this.
- **Ring the hospital if you are worried about anything.**

How do I know when active labour begins?

You may no longer feel comfortable. Lying down and talking can be difficult during a contraction. Some women don't have a clear change from one stage of labour to the next. If you feel labour has changed talk with the hospital midwife for advice.

What will happen if I am admitted to Hospital?

After it is decided to admit you to hospital the midwife will repeat assessments of you and your baby every four to six hours.

You will be encouraged to walk around and be offered comfort measures such as baths, showers and heat packs.

You may be offered pain relief to give you a rest from the contractions. Some women may go to sleep and wake to find the contractions are stronger and more regular, sometimes they stop all together!

If your labour becomes stronger, the assessments will be done more often.

If you do progress into active labour, you will be transferred to the delivery suite for one to one care with a midwife.

Contacting Delivery Suite

For all labour calls day or night, please call Delivery Suite on (04) 8060 850