

# When labour starts...

*Early labour is a normal part of the birthing process*

## What is early labour?

It is when irregular contractions begin to occur, and your cervix softens, shortens and prepares to open. *Early labour can last many hours and is a normal part of the birthing process.*

## What does early labour feel like?

- Contractions are mild to moderate, lasting 30-45 seconds and often irregular
- You may have backache or cramping
- You may have heavy vaginal discharge with blood or mucus
- Your waters may break in a gush or slow leak
- You may have stomach upset
- You may have difficulty sleeping or be emotional

## What can I do for comfort in early labour?

- Contact your support person
- Alternate between an activity such as walking and rest
- Eat light meals if you are hungry
- Drink plenty of fluids
- Breathe slowly through contractions
- Have a shower or bath
- Change position often (see over for examples)
- Apply heat to your lower back
- Try a massage
- Try distracting yourself with an activity you enjoy

## What can I do if I need more help coping with contractions?

- Call your doula (if you have one) and have your partner or support person stay with you
- Call your doctor or midwife (Ask them ahead of time how to reach them outside of office hours)
- Visit the hospital for assessment, information and support - the hospital staff may advise you to go home and return later
- Call your hospital's maternity unit and speak to one of the nurses

## Call your doctor or midwife if:

- Your contractions are much stronger and closer together
- You are having trouble coping with your contractions at home
- You feel like pushing or bearing down with each contraction
- You think your water has broken
- You have heavy vaginal bleeding (more than a period)
- You have noticed that your baby is moving much less than normal
- You have a fever of 38 C (100.4 F) or higher

**Your doctor or midwife can help you decide when it is time to go to the hospital.**

**If you are unable to contact your doctor or midwife you can the BC Women's Hospital Assessment Room at 604-875-3070.**

# Example Labour Positions



**Standing**



**Birthing Ball**



**Sitting upright**



**Kneeling**



**Semi-sitting**



**Side-lying**