

Your important health information

Advice for support people during labour and birth

This information is for people who will be supporting a woman during labour and birth.

In labour, mothers will have many physical and emotional needs. To be an effective support in labour, partners and support people are kept busy. Here are some suggestions for labour at home and in hospital.

To meet emotional needs

- Be positive and encouraging.
- Be enthusiastic.
- Maintain a calm environment.
- Be supportive of all behaviours through her labour.
- Have a helpful and positive response when she is tired or lacking motivation.

To meet physical needs

In labour, try to anticipate your partner's needs. She will focus on the job she is doing and will not always explain how she is feeling. Watch her closely. How does she indicate stress? Watch for clenched fists and tight jaw. Is she able to relax after a contraction? What will help her relax?

Special ways to assist during labour

- If labour begins at night and is mild, help her rest and encourage sleep. If labour begins during the day, a walk can help adjust to labour together.
- Keep in close and relaxed contact with her:
- Encourage eating and keeping up – prepare her favourite foods and bring water, cordial, non-acidic fruit juice.
- Massage - shoulders, back, arms, feet and head. Use firm pressure during a contraction.
- Heat pack - tummy or back: DO NOT overheat as they can burn skin.
Heat packs from home cannot be used in the hospital. Please ask your midwife if you need a heat pack.
- Position changes: assist her to move into them. Rotate between standing, sitting, kneeling and side lying.
- Gentle pelvic rocking / swaying: uses gravity to help baby move lower into pelvis.
- Shower or bath: warm water, pressure and floating can help ease her discomfort.
- Regular trips to the toilet: keeping her bladder empty will help baby move down into pelvis.
- Cool washer or water spray: on neck and face can feel lovely; labour is hot work.
- Music: have a playlist ready – favourites that help her feel secure and comfortable. Change it as necessary.
- Breathing: Breathe with her if she starts to panic. Guide her to breathe in through the nose and blow out through the mouth, during each contraction if necessary.
- Remind her to let her body “go limp” between contractions. Help her to do this with gentle and light touch between contractions.
- Speak tenderly to her, encourage her and tell her how well she is doing.
- Maintain eye contact where possible, especially when contractions become intense.
- Do not be alarmed if she pushes you away or snaps at you. Her body is working hard.
- Once she is pushing, stay very close to her. She will depend on your support.

- Let her know when you can see the baby's head. Help her reach down to touch it or hold a mirror so she can see it if desired.
- Tell her you love her, especially after baby is born.

What can I do if she feels sick in labour?

Hormones that help a mother in labour can make her feel sick.

To help her manage:

- Encourage her to crunch on ice.
- Apply a cool washer for her face and neck.
- Use encouraging words to remind her this is normal.
- Keep a bowl or bag nearby to vomit into and keep long hair tied back.
- If she has vomited, help her rinse her mouth and clean away any vomit from clothing/environment.

How can I help her cope with the pain?

Pain in labour is normal. You cannot remove the pain but you can help her manage it.

- Help her change positions regularly.
- Help her to the bathroom to use the toilet and/or shower.
- Remind her to rest between contractions.
- Remind her she is making progress.
- Avoid setting time limits for the birth.
- You are not alone; your midwife will be supporting you as well as your partner.

When to come to hospital?

Add the hospital's labour and birth contact number to your mobile phone.

Mercy Hospital for Women: 8458 4058	Werribee Mercy Hospital: 8754 3400
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- Phone your hospital OR Maternity Group Practice midwife when regular contractions start or if waters break. You can call the hospital for advice any time, particularly if she is worried about baby movements or bleeding. Midwives will guide you about when to come in.
- Know the route to the hospital and have a backup one in case of heavy traffic or detours.
- Plan who will look after other children or pets while you are away.
- We recommend you attend childbirth classes with your partner during pregnancy and discuss with her plans and preferences for her labour and birth.

For current visitor and COVID-19 Restrictions please speak to the maternity reception of your hospital prior to birthing.

Further Information

If you have any questions regarding this information, please contact Parent Education:

Mercy Hospital for Women

Parent Education
Phone: 03 8458 4152

Werribee Mercy Hospital

Maternity Reception
Phone: 03 8754 3400

Acknowledgements

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This document provides general information only and is not intended to replace advice about your health from a qualified practitioner. If you are concerned about your health, you should seek advice from a qualified practitioner