

## Coping during labour

Your **womb muscles** play an important role during labour. Hydration (enough fluid) allows your womb muscles to work more easily and can make you feel less tired. It can help to **drink** water or any clear fluids (rooibos tea, dilute juice, broth) throughout the labour.

**Eat** light snacks to keep up your energy (fruit, crackers, biltong, boiled eggs, yoghurt).

**Change positions** often as movement helps with pain management. Notice what movements or positions your body wants.

**Walk, rock, sway, squat and lean forward.** You can also use the labour ball if there is one available.

Make a playlist with all your **favourite music** to listen to – make sure to remember to pack your earphones as loud music will not be allowed in the clinic.

Ask your healthworker any **questions** you may have.

Bring a **birth companion** to support you and remind you of all these coping methods. (Choose a companion you know and trust and bring them to the clinic during your pregnancy visits, if possible).

From time to time, the clinic staff will **check** the baby's heartbeat and your blood pressure, temperature, urine and opening of the womb (cervix dilation).

Sometimes, a birthing woman or her baby **may need some extra help**. The healthworkers may need to do tests or procedures to make sure that both are safe. Women should feel free to ask questions about these at any time.








## Important contact Information

Add the details of a trusted contact person who can be with you during labour.

|              |
|--------------|
| Name:        |
| Cell number: |

## Messages to remember during labour

Repeat these messages to yourself throughout your labour and in between contractions. You may have other messages that you find helpful.

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <b>My body knows what to do during labour.</b>   |    |
| <b>My body is powerful.</b>  |    |
| <b>I trust my instincts.</b>   |    |
| <b>The more I relax, the more my body softens and expands, which makes my labour easier.</b> |    |
| <b>The pain (contraction) only lasts for a short time.</b>                                   |    |
| <b>I can get through the contraction by using the breathing technique.</b>                   |   |
| <b>When labour is done, I will meet my baby.</b>   |  |

## Preparing for your baby's birth



Whether you have had positive birth experiences or experiences that have made you afraid or uncertain...

We have written this brief pamphlet for you.

Here, you will find ideas for

- managing fear and pain during labour; and
- remembering your strengths and your options.

You will also find reminders of how labour and birth works, and some of the possibilities that can take place.

Perinatal Mental Health Project (PMHP)

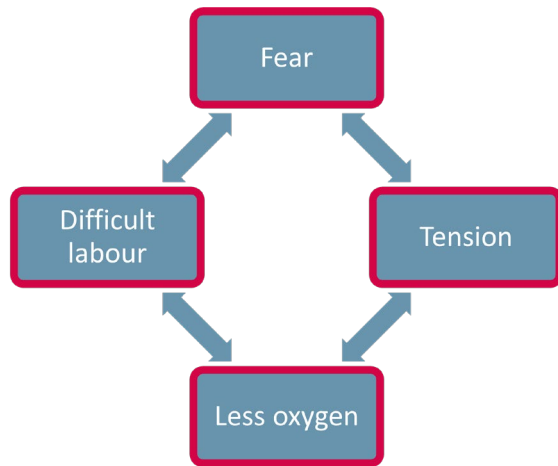
Email: [info@pmhp.za.org](mailto:info@pmhp.za.org)

Website: [www.pmhp.za.org](http://www.pmhp.za.org)



## Awareness about birthing your baby

- Going through labour and giving birth can be **frightening** for some women.
- Your body **is designed** to give birth to a baby.
- Try not to fear this **natural process** that many women have gone through.
- **Fear** creates tension in your body. When you are tense, your muscles are unable to relax.
- Your womb is made up of muscles. Muscles need oxygen to work properly.
- **Fear = tension in your body = less oxygen = womb muscles not able to work effectively.**



## Signs of Labour

Full term (a full pregnancy) is usually anywhere from 38-42 weeks. Watch out for these signs during this time and go to the maternity unit or clinic immediately:

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Your contractions become stronger and closer together.</b>                     | When your contractions are five minutes apart, it is time to go to the maternity unit or clinic. |
| <b>Your water breaks; Heavy bleeding; or You feel no movement from your baby.</b> | Go to the maternity unit or clinic, even if you do not feel contractions.                        |

## What is a Contraction?

- A contraction is the walls of the womb working to get the baby out of your body.
- A contraction is a feeling of tension and tightening in your abdomen.
- They usually become stronger and more frequent as your labour progresses.
- A contraction only lasts between 20 seconds to one minute.
- The pressure that you feel during a contraction can be painful. Sometimes, you can get pain relief (medication or an injection) from the healthworkers.

## Stages of Labour

### Stage 1

This is cervical dilation, the entrance of your womb is opening! **Latent Phase**, you have just started feeling contractions. This phase can be as long as 24 hours and is different for every woman.

**Active Phase**, your contractions become stronger and closer together. This phase can last from 4 - 8 hours.

**Transition Phase**, your cervix (the entrance to the womb) is fully opened (10 cm), and your baby is just about ready to be born. You may feel very tired now, but this is the shortest phase – sometimes lasting between 30 minutes to 2 hours.

### Stage 2 Pushing Stage

Your contractions are feeling different now. **They are shorter. You may feel the urge to push.** Listen to the healthworker on duty, who will guide you during this stage to push at the best times. This stage can last up to 2 hours.

### Stage 3 Placenta (after birth) comes out.

After you've given birth to your baby, an oxytocin injection is given to you to help with the release of your placenta. Your womb will contract, and your placenta will come out through your vagina. This is not usually painful.

## Breathing Technique

**Breathe in deeply and slowly for 4 counts.**

**Breathe out slowly for 8 counts.**

**Visualisation**  
Try to remember a time when you felt safe, calm and relaxed. Hold on to this memory as you do this breathing technique.

- **Breathing technique = calm = more oxygen = relaxed womb = pain is reduced.**
- Make use of the breathing technique when you feel the **contraction start.**
- It will help you **relax** during this short period of pain and can **help with the pain** because it ensures you are taking in **enough oxygen.**
- Continue this way of breathing until the contraction ends.
  - Use the time in between contractions to rest, stretch your legs, drink something, or move your body in a way that feels good for you.

