



The Dudley Group  
NHS Foundation Trust

# Am I in Labour?

## Maternity Department Patient Information Leaflet



## Introduction

This leaflet is for women with normal pregnancies who are over 37 weeks into their pregnancy. It gives information on the signs that your labour may be beginning, and what to do if you are concerned.

## What if I am worried?

**If you have any concerns or queries about whether you are in labour, contact:**

Maternity Triage team on 01384 456111 ext. 3053

**If you are concerned about your baby's movements, or the pattern of movements has changed, please contact:**

Pregnancy Day Assessment Unit on 01384 244586  
(8am to 7pm, Monday to Friday, and 10am to 2pm Saturdays)

At any other time, contact:

Maternity Triage team on 01384 45611 ext. 3053

## What are the signs of labour?

You will probably recognise the signs of labour when the time comes, but if you are in any doubt, please contact the Maternity Triage team.

The main signs of labour starting are strong, regular contractions and a 'show'. A show is when the plug of mucus from your cervix comes away.

Other signs that labour is beginning include: your waters breaking, backache and an urge to go to the toilet, which is caused by your baby's head pressing on your bowel.

You need to contact the Maternity Triage team for advice in some cases.

### Call the Maternity Triage team if:

- If you experience any bleeding (red blood loss).
- Your waters break – this can be felt as a gush of fluid or sometimes as a steady trickle.
- Regular, rhythmic contractions lasting for more than 45 seconds. Please ring the hospital when they are every five minutes.

### You do not need to contact the hospital if:

- You experience Braxton Hicks contractions. These are contractions often felt from mid pregnancy. The abdomen (tummy area) feels hard to touch and they may be uncomfortable.
- You have a show. This is a clear or pink mucous discharge from the vagina. It may contain streaks of blood. It shows that changes are happening to the cervix, and it can happen weeks before delivery.

## What are the stages of labour?

There are various stages of labour:

### The early stage of labour

This is when the neck of the womb (cervix) is shortening. You will experience irregular contractions, every five minutes to every hour, lasting up to 45 seconds. The cervix opens (dilates) to 4cm.

Some women will have backache and cramps, or bouts of contractions that may last a few hours and then stop and start up again the next day. This is perfectly normal.

### First stage of labour

The cervix dilates to 10cm. You will experience regular, painful contractions usually lasting 45 to 60 seconds at least every three to five minutes. The length of this stage varies, depending on factors such as if this is your first baby or not.

### Second stage of labour

The cervix is fully open and the baby moves down through the birth canal and is born. The time this stage takes varies, depending on factors such as if this is your first baby or not.

### Third stage of labour

This is when the placenta (afterbirth) is delivered.

## How can I help myself when labour has started?

It is important to try and relax. Keep your breathing deep, steady and slow during a contraction. This will prevent you from using extra energy. Once the contraction is wearing off, close your eyes and allow your body to rest before the next one. If you can try and sleep, it will help you later in your labour.

Distraction can help. You can try watching your favourite film, reading or listening to music. Take a warm bath or shower, at regular intervals. You will find the warmth of the water soothing and relaxing.

You may want to call your birthing partner for added support during this time. They can massage your back and help you get into positions to help you to deal with the contractions.

It is also important to remain active without exhausting yourself during this time. Gentle exercise, such as a walk or stretching, will help you relax. Stop if you need to during a contraction.

Upright, forward-leaning or kneeling positions tend to help your baby into a good position and can ease pain. Rocking your pelvis and swaying your hips can also help. If you have a birthing ball, use it regularly as this too can help ease your pain.

Try to eat small, light meals containing carbohydrates to help maintain your energy levels. Isotonic drinks, such as Lucozade, will also give you energy and keep you hydrated.

It is safe to take simple painkillers, such as paracetamol, if you can take it. You can take two (500mg) tablets, every four to six hours; however, do not take more than eight tablets within a 24 hour period.

Some women hire a TENS machine. This is most effective if it is put on during the early stage of labour. Complementary therapies can

be helpful but need to be used under the guidance of a qualified practitioner.

## **When should I go to hospital?**

Always call the Maternity Triage team before coming into hospital. The triage midwife will ask you some questions and give you advice based on your answers.

When the midwife advises you to come into the hospital, take a bag packed with your belongings for labour. However, if your labour is not yet established, it is likely we will ask you to return home. This decision will be based on the findings of a thorough examination. Research has suggested that labour wards are not the best environment for women who are in the early stages of labour.

If the triage midwife advises you to stay at home, you can call back at any time of the day or night whenever you need further advice.

Very occasionally a labour can develop very quickly and if you feel your baby's birth is about to happen, please ring for an emergency ambulance on 999.

## Can I find out more?

You can find out more from the following weblinks:

- **NHS Choices:**  
<http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/pregnancy-and-baby/pages/labour-signs-what-happens.aspx>
- **National Childbirth Trust:**  
[http://www.nct.org.uk/sites/default/files/related\\_documents/Guide%20to%20labour%20booklet\\_11.pdf](http://www.nct.org.uk/sites/default/files/related_documents/Guide%20to%20labour%20booklet_11.pdf)

If you have any questions, or if there is anything you do not understand about this leaflet, please contact:

**Maternity Triage team on 01384 456111 ext. 3053**

If you have been seen by a midwife during your pregnancy and do not have a consultant, contact:

**Midwifery-led Unit on 01384 456111 ext. 3593**

**Both telephone lines are staffed by midwives**

If are concerned about your baby's movements or the pattern of movements has changed, contact:

**Pregnancy Day Assessment Unit on 01384 244586**  
(8am to 7pm, Monday to Friday, and 10am to 2pm Saturdays)

At any other time, contact:

**Maternity Triage on 01384 456111 ext. 3053**

Russells Hall Hospital switchboard number: 01384 456111

**This leaflet can be downloaded or printed from:**

<http://dudleygroup.nhs.uk/services-and-wards/maternity/>

If you have any feedback on this patient information leaflet, please email [patient.information@dgh.nhs.uk](mailto:patient.information@dgh.nhs.uk)

**This leaflet can be made available in large print, audio version and in other languages, please call 0800 073 0510.**

للحصول على هذه النشرة بحجم أكبر، وعلى شكل إصدار صوتي و بلغات أخرى، الرجاء الاتصال بالرقم 08000730510.

此宣传单可提供大字版本、音频版本和其它语言版本，请拨打电话：0800 073 0510。

Ulotka dostępna jest również w dużym druku, wersji audio lub w innym języku. W tym celu zadzwoń pod numer 0800 073 0510.

ਇਹ ਪਰਚਾ ਵੱਡੇ ਅੱਖਰਾਂ, ਬੋਲ ਕੇ ਰੀਕਾਰਡ ਕੀਤਾ ਹੋਇਆ ਅਤੇ ਦੂਸਰੀਆਂ ਭਾਸ਼ਾਵਾਂ ਵਿਚ ਵੀ ਪ੍ਰਾਪਤ ਹੋ ਸਕਦਾ ਹੈ, 0800 073 0510 ਤੇ ਫੋਨ ਕਰੋ ਜੀ।

Aceasta broșura poate fi pusă la dispoziție tipărită cu caractere mari, versiune audio sau în alte limbi, pentru acest lucru va rugăm sunați la 0800 073 0510.

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