

Every woman's labour is different, but here is an idea of what may happen when, and what you can do.

	Your partner	You	Your midwife	Your baby
Hours or days before labour starts	<b>What it's like for her:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Niggling contractions may come and go</li> <li>She may have backache</li> <li>She may feel very emotional</li> <li>The mucus plug may come away from her cervix. This is called the show</li> <li>She may have loose bowels</li> <li>She may be unsure if this is labour or not</li> </ul>	<b>What you can do:</b> <p><b>Distract her:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Try a good long walk</li> <li>Watch her favourite feel-good film with her</li> <li>Spend the evening with friends, relaxing</li> </ul> <p><b>Comfort her:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Run a bath or shower then wrap her up in warm towels</li> <li>Make her favourite snacks</li> </ul>	<b>What will our midwife do:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Advise you to stay at home, but to call her if waters break</li> </ul>	<b>What is going on in there:</b> 
Early first stage of labour Lasts hours or days	<b>What it's like for her:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>More regular contractions lasting 30 to 40 seconds every five minutes to 10 minutes</li> <li>She may be excited that labour has started</li> </ul> <p><b>What she may do:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Talk through contractions</li> <li>Make eye contact</li> <li>Smile with relief after each contraction</li> <li>Lean forwards through contractions</li> </ul>	<b>What you can do:</b> <p><b>Remind her to:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use breathing and relaxation techniques</li> <li>Go to the loo every hour or so to keep her bladder empty</li> <li>Stay upright to help labour progress</li> <li>Change position and keep moving</li> </ul> <p><b>Offer her:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A hot water bottle, wheat bag, or back massage</li> <li>Sips of drinks and high-energy snacks</li> </ul>	<b>What will our midwife do:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ask your partner how she's feeling, to get an idea of how strong labour is</li> <li>Advise you to stay at home, but call her if contractions become frequent, regular, and strong</li> <li>Advise on ways to cope at home</li> </ul>	<b>What is going on in there:</b> 
Established first stage of labour Lasts from five hours to 18 hours, average is eight hours	<b>What it's like for her:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Painful contractions lasting 50 seconds to 60 seconds every three minutes to four minutes</li> <li>She may be excited that labour has started, but also anxious</li> <li>She may want to get to the hospital</li> </ul>	<b>What you can do:</b> <p><b>Suggest:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Using the bath or a birth pool</li> <li>Keep moving or walking</li> <li>Using a birth ball</li> </ul> <p><b>Offer:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Firm back massage</li> <li>Snacks and drinks</li> <li>To help her find comfortable positions</li> </ul> <p><b>Ask your midwife for:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Information on progress</li> <li>Suggestions on how to cope</li> <li>Possible pain relief</li> </ul>	<b>What will our midwife do:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Suggest going to hospital, or birth centre, or come to you if you are having a home birth</li> <li>Offer a vaginal examination</li> <li>Regularly check your baby's heartbeat</li> <li>Regularly check your partner's pulse, temperature, and blood pressure</li> <li>Check the strength, length, and frequency of contractions</li> <li>Remind your partner to empty her bladder regularly</li> <li>Offer encouragement and support</li> </ul>	<b>What is going on in there:</b> 



	Your partner	You	Your midwife	Your baby
Transition to second stage of labour  Lasts from a few minutes to an hour or so	<p><b>What it's like for her:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Frequent, strong, long contractions lasting 60 seconds to 90 seconds</li> <li>Contractions peaking twice in strength</li> <li>Waters breaking</li> <li>The urge to push at the peak of contractions</li> </ul> <p><b>What she may do:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Be sick</li> <li>Close her eyes and refuse to look at you</li> <li>Crouch on the floor</li> <li>Shake, cry, swear, shout that she wants it to stop, shout that she can't go on</li> </ul>	<p><b>What you can do:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stay close and keep eye contact</li> <li>Wipe her face between contraction</li> <li>Hug her and help her change position</li> <li>Be aware that she may just want to be left alone</li> </ul> <p><b>Tell her that:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>She is nearly there</li> <li>Each contraction is one closer to your baby</li> <li>She is doing so well</li> </ul> <p><b>Interpret for her:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Repeat what your midwife says if she doesn't hear</li> <li>Answer any questions for her</li> <li>Ask people to wait for a contraction to finish before doing anything to her</li> </ul>	<p><b>What will our midwife do:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Regularly check your baby's heartbeat</li> <li>Regularly check your partner's pulse, temperature, and blood pressure</li> <li>Feel the strength of contractions</li> <li>May do a vaginal examination to see if the cervix is fully dilated</li> <li>Offer encouragement and support</li> </ul>	<p><b>What is going on in there:</b></p> 
Second stage: pushing and your baby's birth  Lasts from 30 minutes to two hours	<p><b>What it's like for her:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strong urge to push at the peak of each contraction</li> <li>A longer break between contractions</li> <li><b>Burning feeling as your baby's head stretches the opening to her vagina</b></li> <li>Exhaustion sets in</li> </ul> <p><b>What she may do:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>She may make loud, deep noises with each contraction</li> <li>Say, shout, or scream she wants it to stop</li> <li>Intense emotion as your baby is born, or just relief that it's all over</li> </ul>	<p><b>What you can do:</b></p> <p><b>Encourage her:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To listen to her body</li> <li>To push when she gets the urge</li> <li>To breathe between pushes</li> <li>To listen when your midwife tells her not to push</li> </ul> <p><b>Be practical:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sit her up if she has slipped down the bed</li> <li>Wipe her face between contractions</li> <li>Offer sips of water</li> <li><b>Tell her when you can see your baby's head</b></li> </ul>	<p><b>What will our midwife do:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Check your baby's heartbeat often</li> <li>Check which bit of your baby is coming first</li> <li>Say when to push and when to pant</li> <li>Watch the perineum to make sure it is stretching</li> <li>Be joined by a second midwife for the birth</li> <li><b>Check that the cord is not around your baby's neck and if it is, ease it over your baby's head</b></li> <li>Guide your baby out and lift your baby onto your partner's tummy</li> <li>Give your partner an injection as your baby is born, if your partner wants the placenta delivered quickly</li> </ul>	<p><b>What is going on in there:</b></p> 
Third stage: pushing out the placenta  Lasts from 10 minutes to an hour	<p><b>What it's like for her:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A short break, followed by tightening in her uterus</li> </ul> <p><b>What she may do:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lie back, and feel anything from exhaustion through to relief and euphoria!</li> </ul>	<p><b>What you can do:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Give yourself a pat on the back - <b>you're a dad!</b></li> <li>Help her hold your baby skin-to-skin</li> <li>Say hello to your baby</li> <li><b>Cut your baby's cord, if you want to</b></li> <li>Have time together as a new family</li> <li>Offer her a drink and make sure she has something to eat</li> <li>Help her to breastfeed</li> <li>Help her shower and dress</li> <li>Take plenty of pictures</li> <li>Tell the world</li> <li>Hug everyone — your partner, the midwife, a passing doctor or nurse...</li> </ul>	<p><b>What will our midwife do:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Wipe your baby to help keep him warm</li> <li>Support skin-to-skin cuddles or first breastfeed</li> <li>Check how well the placenta is coming away from the uterus, and deliver the placenta</li> <li>Check for heavy blood loss</li> <li>Check if your partner needs stitches</li> </ul> <p><b>Congratulations!</b></p> <p>Now continue your parenting journey at <a href="http://www.babycentre.co.uk/baby/dads">www.babycentre.co.uk/baby/dads</a></p>	<p><b>What is going on in there:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The placenta comes away from your partner's uterus wall</li> <li>Her uterus contracts down, closing off blood vessels</li> </ul> 

