

# Labor Coach Guide

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Your job as the labor coach is to support the mother-to-be physically and emotionally during labor and delivery. Labor is a team effort and your help is crucial to this birth. Here are some ways you can help:

## Early Labor... Warming up

**Physical changes:** The cervix dilates from closed to about 3 cm. Cervix starts to efface (soften/thin). Contractions are about 5-20 minutes apart.

**Time frame:** one hour to many, many hours.

**Time her contractions:** Measure from the beginning of one contraction to the beginning of the next. Keep a record. Usually, your provider will recommend coming to the hospital when contractions are 5 minutes apart for an hour. Call your provider to find out details.

**Keep her calm:** You will both be excited and nervous, as you should be! Your job is to keep your partner relaxed with minimal anxiety. She may benefit from: deep breaths during contractions, massage, or suggesting she relax muscles in her face, hands and jaw.

**Distract her:** Suggest activities, such as watching a movie, taking a walk or a shower, tell her jokes, changing positions. Try to keep moving.

**Ask her what she needs:** If she isn't sure, do your best to suggest something that you think might make her feel better. If she doesn't take you up on your suggestion, don't take it personally.

**Give encouragement:** Praise her through each contraction. Remind her that with each passing contraction, she is getting closer to meeting the baby, and that it is one less contraction she will ever have in her life. Do NOT criticize her or pretend the pain doesn't exist. She may need empathy and support, even if she isn't complaining.

**Take care of yourself:** To keep up your strength, have some snacks and beverages. If you feel faint, sit down. Make sure you have eaten recently. Pack some snacks to bring to the hospital (the food there will be terrible). Give yourself breaks when appropriate. If you need to leave the room and there is another, trusted person with your partner, communicate that you will be back (and tell her a time you will return).

## Active Labor... Game on!

**Physical changes:** Cervix dilates from 3 or 4 cm to 7 cm. Contractions increase in strength and frequency. Cervix becomes more soft and thin.

**Time frame:** On average, 3-8 hours.

**Control the atmosphere:** Many women prefer a quiet, calm room with dim lights. Some may like music and sunshine. You will know best what she prefers. You are room monitor, if there is an unwanted visitor, you have the authority to kick them out. Try to avoid your partner having to be polite to unwanted guests while she is in labor. However, sometimes women change their mind who they want present. Occasionally, a normally annoying relative can be helpful while in labor.

**Help her through contractions:** Some women want help with focusing on breathing exercises. Ask the care professionals for tips on breathing exercise techniques. Offer to help her change positions. Offer massage, ice chips or sips of beverage (ask nurse first). Keep the ice chips full.

**Be an advocate:** As much as possible, serve as her go-between with the health care team. Don't hesitate to ask questions about how her labor is progressing or to ask for explanations for any procedures or medications. If your partner request pain medications, discuss options.

**Be aware of your non verbal communication:** She may vomit, poop and/or urinate. There may be unpleasant odors. She may make strange noises. Don't worry, this is normal. Be aware of your facial expressions so that she isn't embarrassed by these perfectly normal bodily functions.

**Continue to give encouragement:** By the time a woman is in active labor, she is tired and very uncomfortable, and perhaps a bit edgy. Say things like "You are doing great! I am really proud of you!" Remember, this is likely the most difficult day of her entire life and she is being the strongest she has ever had to be. Appreciate her for this.

**Don't take things personally:** Things may be said in labor that isn't meant. Don't take it personally if your partner seems irritated with your thoughtful attempts to comfort her or if she ignores you. Your presence alone is comforting and sometimes all that is needed. Have a sense of humor.

**Take care of yourself:** Stay hydrated and make sure to have some snacks. You need your strength too!

## Transition ... Hang on to your hat! Here we go!

**Physical changes:** Cervix dilates 7cm to 10cm (aka complete). Contractions are very strong and intense.

**Time Frame:** Varies.

**Put her needs first:** Do not go out for a burger and fries right now. (But stay hydrated).

**Continue to help her through contractions:** This is likely the hardest part of labor for your partner. Continue coaching methods that have been effective. Holding hands, staying near, and making eye contact can be helpful. Some women may want more space in this stage, give it to her.

## Pushing and Delivery... “I can see a head!”

**Physical changes:** The baby is being pushed through the birth canal. Contractions are strong and intense.

**Time frame:** Minutes to several hours.

**Focus on your partner:** Stay focused on her face. Many women are “in the zone” and may not make eye contact now. The health care providers will be focused on the technical side of labor and the baby’s wellbeing, try to remain focused on what your partner is going through emotionally. This is the most intense moment of her entire life.

**Be aware of your non verbal communication:** See above.

**Stay close by:** A lot may happen quickly when it comes time for her to push. Or she may have to push off and on for several hours. Don’t feel that you are in the way as the care providers take charge. Your presence is particularly important now.

**Cut the cord, if desired:** If offered the opportunity to cut the cord, don’t panic. The care providers will give you instructions. You can’t hurt the baby or the mother- there are no nerves. It will feel like cutting through a giant gummy worm.

**Celebrate!** Enjoy bonding with the baby and give your partner well-earned words of praise. This labor has been a rite of passage into motherhood and your partner is now even more prepared to handle anything that comes her way.