What to Expect when Giving Birth â€“ Phase One

By Debra Aspinall

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All women wonder how they will cope having a baby. Of course itâ€™s natural to be a little anxious, but it helps to tackle the fear of the unknown by talking to other women whoâ€™ve been through the experience or reading about how labour progresses so you know what happens at each stage.

A first labour usually lasts between 12 and 16 hours (although it can be shorter or longer). Second, third and following labours are often much shorter, but if the subsequent babies are larger then labour may last just as long.

A woman goes through early labour (which some women donâ€™t even notice is happening) then three more recognisable stages of labour.

Giving birth is rarely speedy, although weâ€™ve all heard examples of babies who have rushed out before mum has a chance to reach hospital.

The very early stage of labour can take hours, or even days as contractions usually start very mildly as little more than a twinge and start to build up as they put pressure on your cervix to open up (dilate).

If you have been advised by your GP to go into hospital early, or thereâ€™s a snow storm forecasted, then now is the time to set off. But if you are not expected to have any complications you might as well stay in the comfort of your own home.

Moving around during early labour, or soaking in a warm bath will help you cope with the early contractions.

During this time you may experience a show - a mucus plug which seals the opening of the cervix and comes away as a blob or series of small blobs in your underwear.

This occurs when the cervix stretches and softens. It can happen a couple of hours or even a couple of days before giving birth.

Once you are having strong, regular contractions, lasting about 45â€“60 seconds and coming every five to 10 minutes you will need to go to the hospital. If you are having a baby at home, now is the time to call your midwife.

At the hospital your midwife will assess how close you are to giving birth and discuss your pain relief choices.

You may be connected to a hand-held Doppler or a foetal monitor to check babyâ€™s heartbeat. You will be encouraged to eat light snacks and to drink plenty of liquid.

Meanwhile you cervix will be dilating â€“ it has to open to 10cm during the first stage and the time this takes varies from woman to woman.

As labour progresses, your contractions will become much stronger with hardly any gaps in between them and you may feel the urge to push. But your midwife will tell you when you can safely do this.

In the early stages of having a baby your partner can help with their encouragement, back rubs,

feeding you sips of water, or moping your brow with a cool cloth.

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Debra Aspinall is an experienced journalist and the editor and leading writer for the Emmaâ€™s Diary website, one of the UKs foremost pregnancy and baby websites. She writes on pregnancy week by week, a having a baby, a free baby stuff and etc. If you are searching for pregnancy information, please visit us at Emmasdiary.co.uk.

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