

## The Latent Phase of Labour

### Midwifery Services

This leaflet has been written with midwifery led care women in mind. If you are seen by doctors or consultants please have a discussion with your midwife before following this advice.



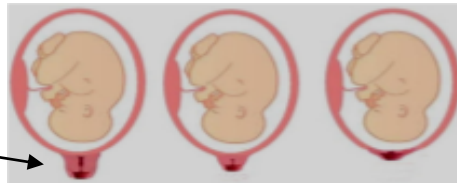
#### What is the latent phase?

The latent or **warming up** phase is the body **getting ready** for active labour.

Every woman's experience is different so it can be difficult to know what to expect, but during this stage you may have irregular tightening's, backache and / or period type pains.

#### CERVIX

Softens and thins, getting ready to open



It can be very **stop-start**. It can last for a few hours or a few days.

The baby's head might **engage** a bit more and you might have a "**show**" (a mucous discharge which may be lightly blood-stained or brown)

Active labour comes later – it's when things start to **gather pace**, you will find your **focus** will be more on the contractions and they will be more **intense** and **regular**. This is usually when you would contact the hospital.

**The active phase is said to begin when the cervix is 4cms or more dilated with strong regular contractions.**

#### Eating and drinking

Eating and drinking is very important for all stages of labour.

## You would not run a marathon on an empty stomach.



It's helpful to bring snacks and drinks with you, so you can eat and drink, little and often during labour. This is especially important if you plan to use a bath or birth pool as your body dehydrates more quickly.



### Suggestions:

- Still isotonic sports drinks
- Bananas/fruit
- Flapjacks/cereal bars
- Biscuits/chocolate
- Dried fruit/nuts



If your body is dehydrated or lacks energy it will not sustain the strong contractions needed for your labour to progress

Try to pass urine every few hours, this makes sure your bladder does not get too full as this can cause problems too.

### What can help?

- **Have a bath or shower.** Warm water can help relax you and ease the pain of contractions.
- **Distract yourself.** You could go for a walk, potter around the house, or sit on a birth ball watching a DVD.



- Be careful not to wear yourself out though, you could be in labour for some time – follow your instincts, mix **rest with periods of activity** – but we do know that an **upright** position can help to shorten labour.



- There are lots of **positions** you can adopt to help you cope with labour. These may **change** depending on how you are feeling – do whatever feels **right for you**.

- We know women who like **rhythm** and **repetition** during birth.



- **Lean** on or over a wall, bed, bean bag or cushions.

- **Kneel**, hold onto a partner or chair, try some “slow dancing”



- **Rock or circle** your pelvis in any position that is comfortable or on a birth ball.

## Top Tips

Birth is a cocktail of hormones, to get them all working together you need to feel safe, supported and not scared – Pick **birth companions** who you know will support you



and **turn off lights**, close the curtains, make your own little **nest**.

Other things that can help:  
**familiar things** around you,  
your own **music**.



**Scents** that remind you of  
relaxation or a lovely memory



**Breathing** well in birth can help with reducing fear and give your baby lots of oxygen.

**Massage** can help those birth hormones and be a distraction – follow our link to a useful video.

## When to phone

We advise you to stay at home as long as possible during the latent phase as there's lots of research to say this is the quickest way for labour to start.



## We advise you to call us if you experience:

- Strong regular contractions
- Waters breaking or fresh red bleeding
- A change in baby's movements
- Constant pain
- Any other concerns

We may not always advise you to come into the hospital – we may give you more advice and support to stay home a little longer.

You are always welcome to attend for an individual assessment if you would prefer, but you might be advised to return home after this.

Most importantly, we advise you to contact us whenever you need some support/guidance or with any questions. We are always here to help.

## For further information

### Contact Numbers ( 24/7 )

RGH Newport Birth Centre	01633 234 009
Triage	01633 238 164
YYF	01443 802 437
NHH Birth Centre	01872 732 137
NHH Labour Ward	01872 732 390