

Phases of Labor

Early / Latent Phase

01

How to Tell:

- Birthing person is usually alert, talkative, excited, able to walk, laugh, or talk through contractions.
- Often engages with others and may eat, drink, or move around.
- Birther might say “I feel fine, just some tightening.”, “This isn’t so bad.”, or “I think it’s starting.”

Contractions mild to moderate; feels like menstrual cramps or backache.

**Lasting 30-45 seconds.
Every 5-30 minutes**

Cervix Changes:
Dilation: 0-3 cm.

Effacement: Thinning begins.
Softening and moving forward in the pelvis.

Active Phase

02

How to Tell:

- Birthing person becomes more serious and focused.
- Less talkative during contractions, may close eyes or sway.
- Uses breathing techniques or focuses inward.
- Birther might say, “I need to focus.”, “These are stronger.”

Contractions moderate to strong.

**Lasting 45-60 seconds.
Every 3-5 minutes**

Cervix Changes:
Dilation: 4-7 cm.

Effacement: Significant progress.
Steady and faster dilation compared to early phase.

Transition Phase

03

How to Tell:

- Birthing person may appear overwhelmed, restless, or irritable.
- May feel hot/cold, nauseous, shaky, or have the urge to bear down.
- May withdraw completely or become more vocal.
- Often says “I can’t do this”, “I need this to be over.”, “I can’t.”, or wants to quit.

Contractions very strong, peak intensity.

**Lasting: 60-90 seconds.
Every 2-3 minutes**

Cervix Changes:
Dilation: 8-10 cm (complete).

Effacement: Complete.
Baby descends into the birth canal.