



INFORMATION SHEET FOR THE 'LATENT' PHASE OF LABOUR

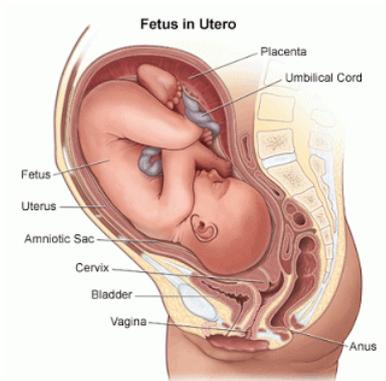
What is the latent stage of labour?

Labour has 3 stages

- The first stage is when the neck of the womb (cervix) opens to 10 centimetres
- The second stage is when the baby moves down through the vagina and is born
- The third stage is when the afterbirth (placenta/whenua) is delivered

Labour is a journey, which can take a long time and every woman is different. This leaflet gives you suggestions to help with the early part of the first stage.

What is the 'latent' (early) stage of labour?



Before labour starts, the neck of the womb (cervix) is long, firm and closed. During this 'latent' phase, the muscles of the uterus (womb) contracts and makes the cervix become softer, at the same time it opens to 3-4cms. This is also called 'effacement' or 'thinning' of your cervix.

The latent phase can last several days or weeks before active labour starts. Some women can feel backache or cramps during this phase. Some women will have bouts of contractions lasting a few hours which then stops and starts up again the next day.

THIS IS NORMAL.

'Braxton Hicks' contractions occur all through pregnancy. They are tightening of the muscle of the uterus and last for about 30 seconds. They are usually painless. During the 'latent' phase, Braxton Hicks contractions may become more noticeable and more frequent, lasting 35-45 seconds. However, some women may not notice anything happening at all.



Before labour begins, the cervix becomes thinner and softer.

The 'latent' phase of labour is the very first part of your labour – the early part of the first stage. During this phase, the neck of womb thins and opens up to about 3-4 cms.



REMEMBER – THE ‘LATENT’ PHASE OF LABOUR CAN LAST A LONG TIME, ESPECIALLY FOR FIRST TIME MUMS

What can I do in the ‘latent phase’ of labour?

It is not possible to say when active labour begins. It could start in a couple of hours or in several days, so try to stay as relaxed as you can and distract yourself from focussing on the contractions.

Things you can do

- Potter around the house
- Talking a walk
- Watching a DVD
- Taking a warm bath or shower
- Having a nap (sleep is important in the early stages of labour)
- Doing some relaxation
- Massage – ask your partner or support person to do this for you
- Putting a hot water bottle or heat pack on the areas that hurt, your lower back or your tummy (under your bump). Make sure it is not too hot.
- Keep as mobile as you can but remember to save your energy for the active phase of labour
- Taking paracetamol, two tablets every four hours BUT no more than 8 tablets in 24 hours
- Try different positions, use the birthing ball
- Drink plenty of fluids eg. Water, isotonic sports drinks to keep well hydrated
- Eat little and often
- A TENS machine may be applied at this stage of labour
- Sex may help to produce oxytocin. This hormone is produced in labour and makes the uterus contract
- Listening to music

Partners and support people

- Lots of cuddles and encouragement
- Massage – YUMMY
- Reminding you to drink
- Keep you company and making you laugh

Avoid

- Bright lights
- People asking you questions which you have to think to answer
- People talking to you during a contraction
- Feeling as if people are watching you

By having privacy, quiet and being in a darkened room helps you feel safe means your ‘rational’ brain will be less stimulated and your body can labour.

If you have any concerns please call Jamie or Marie on 027 472 0077 or 0800 the midwife and we are here to support and advise you.