



Coping with Labor Pain

How bad does labor hurt?

Labor and birth are different for each person. The amount of pain and where you feel pain the most changes during labor. Even if you have had a baby before, labor pain can be different with each baby. Nobody can know ahead of time how difficult or painful their labor will be.

Why does labor hurt?

During labor, your uterus (womb) pushes your baby down and stretches your cervix (the opening of your uterus). When your uterus has a contraction (muscles get tight), you feel pain that is like a strong cramp in your abdomen or lower back. Labor pain usually feels like the cramps you feel during your period. As labor goes on and the cervix gets more stretched, the cramping pain usually gets worse. Most contractions last 30 to 60 seconds, and you will be able to rest in between each one.

How can I decide before labor starts what will be the best way for me to cope with labor pain?

- Take childbirth classes. The more you know, the less you fear. Being afraid and worried makes pain hurt more. Knowing what to expect will help you cope better with labor pain.
- Learn about the different medication and non-medication options for coping with pain that are used where you are going to give birth.

What can I do to prepare for labor?

- Stay physically active during pregnancy. You will have more strength to get through labor. Also, women who are in good physical shape often have shorter labors.
- Find a support person or doula to be with you during labor. Having a person whose only job is to be with you and support you during labor will help you cope better.
- Talk with your support persons and caregivers about your ideas for what will help you cope with labor pain so that you can trust them to help you make decisions that are right for you when you are in labor.

What can I do to cope during early labor?

- Stay up and out of bed. Walking and being on your feet can help your contractions work better but feel less painful.
- Do something you enjoy. This will help you keep your mind off the pain.
- Drink lots of fluids so you don't get dehydrated. Eat lightly if you are hungry.
- Take a warm shower or bath. Water often makes your contractions easier to handle.

What can I do to cope during active labor?

Women who cope well during labor rock or move and sometimes make a noise like groaning during contractions. Then they rest between contractions. Going back and forth between moving and resting in a regular rhythm helps them cope with labor as it progresses. Each person has their own rhythm that works. Here are some ideas to help you find your rhythm during labor:

Between contractions

- Rest by being still or by rocking gently.
- Focus on your breathing in and breathing out. When you pay close attention to your breathing, your body can relax.
- Relax your muscles, especially your shoulders and toes. Those muscles often get tight during contractions.
- Move or rock your hips to relax those muscles.
- Change positions often.
- Listen to music that soothes you. This may help you relax and keep your mind off the pain.



During contractions

- Get in a tub or shower. Water can help labor feel less painful.
- Make noise. You can moan, hum, or repeat comforting words over and over as you go through each contraction.
- Some women find different breathing patterns taught in childbirth classes helpful.
- Move back and forth or rock your hips in whatever way helps you cope as the contraction gets more painful and then gets less painful as it goes away.

What can my support person do to help me cope with labor pain?

- Help you find your rhythm and then help you keep making the same noise and movements during a contraction and doing the same relaxing things between contractions.
- Hold your hand quietly.
- Touch or rub your back, hands, or feet if being touched is something you like.
- Offer you juice, water, or ice chips between contractions.
- Help you change positions and support your body.
- Make the room you are in comforting. Keep the lights low, play soft music, and have something to look at that relaxes you or makes you happy.
- Put a cold washcloth on your forehead or neck.
- Put a heating pad or warm washcloth on your lower back.
- Talk to you and remind you that you are strong.

What can my health care provider do to help me cope with labor pain?

- Answer your questions.
- Check your progress and give you information about how the labor is going.
- Provide information about different ways to help you cope with labor pain.

Childbirth Connection: Comfort in Labor

<https://www.nationalpartnership.org/our-work/resources/health-care/maternity/comfort-in-labor-simkin.pdf>

Childbirth Connection: Labor Pain

<http://www.childbirthconnection.org/giving-birth/labor-pain/>

Cleveland Clinic: Coping with Labor Pain without Using Medicines

<https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/articles/15586-labor-without-medication-coping-skills>

Mayo Clinic: Choosing How You Want to Cope with Labor Pain

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/labor-and-delivery/in-depth/labor-pain/art-20044845>

Mayo Clinic: Medicines for Labor Pain

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/labor-and-delivery/in-depth/labor-and-delivery/art-20049326>

Penny Simkin: Relaxation, Rhythm, and Ritual: The 3 Rs of Childbirth

<https://www.pennysimkin.com/three-rs/>

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