



Pre-Labour

So you are having your first baby and have clocked up 41 weeks into your pregnancy. You and your partner are excited and slightly nervous anticipating the arrival of your baby and the relatives have made ten phone calls during the day to see if anything is happening. It's 3am and you went to bed watching the late night movie and now you have woken up having a few contractions, some stronger & more intense than others but quite irregular and all over the place.

What should you do?

Scenario 1 – wake your partner up excitedly, tell your partner that the baby is coming and start pacing the house.

Scenario 2 – Remember that this process of prelabour or latent phase of labour can last for a few days to a week so back to bed, maybe have a hot shower and get the heatpack and something to eat and try and sleep. Dozing in between the contractions is vital at this stage. If the contractions are 5 – 10 minutes apart and not lasting very long then you can doze in the time between the contractions. The more excited you become, the more the hormones that interfere with the production of oxytocin will surge and this will reduce the oxytocin & endorphin levels, which in turn prolongs this phase so it is best to rest as much as possible.

If you find lying down more uncomfortable, then making a nest with pillows and a beanbag with you lying upright resting your head can enable you to doze and rest in between these contractions.

Call your midwife immediately if you're worried, have any bleeding other than a show or the contractions become very intense; 2- 3 minutes apart, lasting 60 – 90 seconds or your waters break and the fluid is green or yellow. Otherwise, call your midwife in the morning to let her know what's happening.

Well its morning of day 1 prelabour and you have managed to doze and feel rested, the contractions have settled. You are only having a few intermittently and the baby has been moving around and you're wondering if your partner should go to work.

You call the midwife and you tell what's been happening and you ask her if it's alright to go for a walk to get things going, after all you are overdue & want to meet the baby finally.

Organic Midwifery midwives will explain the prelabour phase and encourage you to rest as much as possible. Anything that may be used to hurry up this process, usually leads your uterus to become irritated and for you to become exhausted so that by the time you get into active labour you do not have the required energy to manage the labour.

Day 2 & 3 Irregular contractions have persisted over the last two nights and you're getting tired. Your partner & mother want to know when this baby is going to be born. Even though you have called you midwife to go through strategies to manage prelabour and everything is ok, sometimes you might need the midwife to visit you at home during this time for added reassurance & encouragement. This is easily arranged and the midwife can do an antenatal check at the same time, checking the baby's position & discussing the merits of an internal examination if you choose and listening to the baby's heartbeat. If all these are within normal parameters then your midwife will leave you til you next call or keep checking on you daily if needs be.



No one is sure precisely what initiates' labour but we do know that the uterus has oxytocic receptors and the cervix has prostaglandin receptors so when labour is initiated then these hormones are released and the process begins. However, the third component is the baby and if the baby isn't ready or in a good position, then the established labour phase may be prolonged and prelabour may last awhile. So using this time wisely is important to get you through the active phase of labour.

The prelabour is a really important part of the process as it does assist you to develop the right frame of mind for labour, with hormones gradually building up over time, in order to allow your body to cope with the demands that will be placed on it over the next few days. Prelabour will also assist the baby to get in the right position, the contractions push the baby down onto the cervix and this helps the cervix to thin out so when active labour commences, then all the cervix has to do is dilate. So, do not become disheartened if prelabour seems to drag on or you feel like you're getting tired. This process will ensure that the active labour is efficient and shorter and you and your partner will find it a more positive experience.

The keys things you and your partner need to concentrate on are:

1. Resting & Sleeping. Conserving your energy is crucial.
2. Patience Try not to think about the time as babies do not work on a schedule so the time it takes, is the time the baby needs to be born gently and calmly without distress.
3. Eating and drinking every 2 hours if you are awake, even at night. Food that is high in complex carbohydrates is ideal. So, pasta, rice, porridge & potato are good. If you don't feel like eating, make sure you have energy drinks on hand that replace your electrolytes. Remember, eating in prelabour helps to prevent vomiting in active labour and prevents ketosis
4. Ensure that you pass urine every 2- 3 hours when awake as this keeps the bladder empty allowing the baby to move further down the birth canal
5. The midwife cannot tell you how long this process will take but we can guide you and your support team through it. The baby will be born when everything is in place and it is ready to be born. Rarely, there are instances where it will not come out, if you give him or her the time it needs.
6. Usually if prelabour is longer, then the active labour will be shorter and easier to manage so all the work that you are doing in this latent phase will benefit you in established labour

To conclude, pre-labour is a normal part of the birthing process. Some women do not experience this phenomenon; others do, so the midwives at Organic Midwifery treat every woman and their journey in a unique & individual way.

Remember that women are designed to manage endurance tasks, therefore, preparation for a marathon with all its endorphin and oxytocin releases is the best way to manage prelabour so by the time the baby is born, the sense of achievement is beyond words.

i) Ketosis is the abnormal release of ketone bodies in the body in the conditions of reduced or disturbed carbohydrate metabolism. In the first instance the body will derive energy from carbohydrates. However, once they are used up, it will metabolise fat stored. Ketone bodies and fatty acids are a by product of this process. This is a more inefficient way of producing energy and can lead to harmful side effects.