

Childbirth: labour and delivery

Childbirth progresses in three stages: **labour**, **delivery** and delivery of the placenta.

Labour.

It involves three phases, called early, active and transitional labour.

Phase 1: Early labour

The first of the three stages of labour is usually the longest, but the least intense. Over a **span** of time from several hours to several weeks, the cervix will open to three centimetres and will begin to **thin out** (a process known as *effacement*). Women will experience **mild** to moderate contractions that last 30 to 45 seconds and are spaced 5 to 20 minutes apart – although they may not even notice them until the final two to six hours, and contractions might not come in perfectly spaced intervals. It is possible that amniotic membranes will **rupture** now, but this usually happens later. Women might feel now backache or cramps.

Phase 2: Active labour

Contractions will **grow stronger** and longer and this phase will usually last from two to three and a half hours. Women are usually in the hospital by this phase. As cervix dilates to seven centimetres, contractions will come every 3 to 4 minutes and will typically last 40 to 60 seconds.

Phase 3: Transitional labour

During transitional labour, the last, most intensive, and fortunately the shortest of the phases of labour (generally lasting from 15 minutes to an hour), the cervix will dilate from seven to its final ten centimetres. Contractions are very strong at this point – usually 60 to 90 seconds long, and with intense **peaks**. During transition, women feel strong pressure in the lower back and rectum, nausea, fatigue, **tightness** in the throat and chest area, **shakiness**, **chills**, or **sweats**.

Delivery.

With dilation complete, it is time to help the baby through the birth canal by pushing. Delivery generally takes 30 minutes to 1 hour (second and **subsequent** babies will usually be faster than first ones), but it can be as short as a few minutes – or as long as several hours. During this stage, contractions should be more regular (usually about 2 to 5 minutes apart), but they will still last for 60 to 90 seconds each.

Delivery of the placenta.

With the baby finally out of the birth canal, the hard work is over. The placenta **hosted** the baby for most of his or her **stay** in the uterus. This last stage of childbirth usually lasts from 5 to 20 minutes or more. Mild contractions that last about 1 minute each will help separate the placenta from the uterine **wall** and move it through the birth canal so that it can be pushed out.

chill: *brivido*

delivery: *parto*

to grow stronger: *aumentare di intensità*

to host: *ospitare*

labour: *travaglio*

mild: *leggero*

peak: *picco*

to rupture: *rompersi*

shakiness: *tremore*

span: *lasso*

stage: *fase*

stay: *soggiorno*


subsequent: *successivo*

sweat: *sudorazione*

to thin out: *assottigliarsi*

tightness: *contrattura*

wall: *(qui) membrana*

1  Decide if the following statements are true (T) or false (F). Then correct the false ones.

- | | T | F |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| a. Early labour is the most intense of the phases of labour. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b. Contractions are not very strong during early labour. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c. Contractions are the longest during early labour. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| d. The cervix will open up to seven centimetres during active labour. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| e. There will be intervals of ten minutes between contractions during active labour. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| f. Transitional labour is not very intensive. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| g. Contractions usually last from 60 to 90 seconds during transitional labour. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| h. Time needed for delivery is the same for every woman. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| i. Contractions continue during delivery. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| j. Contractions stop when the placenta is delivered. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

2  Underline the main facts in the text above and tell your class about them.



Labour...



... Welcome!