

BOOKLET 5

LABOUR AND BIRTH

You will probably have many questions about labour and birth. For example, *how will you know when your baby is ready to be born?* **You can read about labour and birth in this booklet.**



LABOUR AND BIRTH

**Women's bodies are very good
at having babies**

**Your doctor is there to help you have
your baby**

Every labour is different

**It takes a long time for a baby to be
born, usually many hours**

**Talk to your doctor about what you are
thinking and feeling when you are in
labour and giving birth to your baby**

**Rest and talk about your feelings after
your baby is born**

Not long to go now!

After 9 months inside you, your baby is ready to be born.

Now there is a bit more work to do.

Just remember, women's bodies are very good at having babies!

Before long you will be holding your baby in your arms.



Labour

'Labour' is another way of saying that your body is getting ready for the birth. It is good to learn as much as you can about labour and birth. Other mums are usually happy to tell you all about it!

Just remember that every labour is different.

What sorts of things have you heard about labour? Write them down here:



Labour can start in many different ways. Sometimes women are not sure if labour has started.

Some of the signs that labour might be starting are:

- **cramps**, like period pain
- **a thick blob of mucous from your vagina**
– sometimes this has blood in it and sometimes it's clear
- **a gush or leak of water from your vagina**, sometimes this feels like you have wet yourself but the water keeps coming or dribbling
- **back aches**

No one can say just how long your labour will last.

From the first signs of labour, it could be many hours before your baby is born. The time it takes to have a baby is different for every baby.

First babies often take longer than later ones.

Sometimes babies come sooner than expected.

Sometimes pregnant women experience early or 'premature' labour. This is when labour starts before 37 weeks.

There are medicines that might stop or slow the labour down – this is to give the baby a bit longer to develop before he or she is born.

If you think you are in early labour, stop what you are doing and call your doctor or the hospital.



Babies who are born early often need special care. And they stay in hospital for longer than usual. With special care, even babies born as early as 24 weeks may survive. Almost all babies born after 30 weeks will be fine.

If your baby is born early, he or she will receive the best possible care.



Labour Pains (Contractions)

During labour you will feel contractions. Contractions are when your tummy goes very tight and you feel pain. The pain over your tummy and lower back will come and go, in waves.

- **Try to rest between contractions**
- **Focus on the goal of seeing your baby!**

During your labour the contractions get stronger and stronger. And they last longer, and you have less time to rest between them. You'll probably feel worn out. You might even feel angry. It's OK if you want to shout or swear!



Things you can do about labour pains

There are lots of things that you can do to help you get through your labour pains.

Your body is strong – especially in labour.

Try to be positive about the labour pains – they have a really good purpose – that is, helping your baby to be born.

THINGS YOU CAN DO

- **Walk around** and change positions
- **Rock gently back and forwards**, or from side to side
- **Have a warm shower**, or rest in the bath
- Play your favourite music
- Ask your support person to **massage your lower back**
- **Focus** on your breathing

Soothing words from your support person can help a lot!

Your doctor can give you something for the pain, for example:

- Nitrous oxide (or 'laughing gas')
- Drugs that are given as injections
- An epidural, which is medication given through a fine soft tube into your back
- A local anaesthetic, to numb your vagina area

Talk with your doctor about the advantages and disadvantages of these types of pain relief.



The Role of Your Doctor During Labour

Even if a doctor has looked after you during your pregnancy, it is likely that when you are in labour nurses and other hospital staff will be caring for you.

Nurses are there to help you.

Talk to the doctor and nurses about what you are thinking and feeling.

Listen to the doctor and nurses and try to do what they ask.

There are lots of things that the doctor and nurses will do to help make sure that you and your baby are OK during your labour:

- **Listen and talk to you** and your support person
- **Check your baby's heartbeat**
- Check your **blood pressure and temperature**
- Feel your tummy for the position of your baby
- Feel and watch how your contractions change
- **May do a vaginal examination**

A vaginal examination is where the doctor puts his or her fingers gently inside your vagina to feel for the top of the baby's head and the neck of the womb.

This will tell your doctor how your labour is going.



The final stages of labour are exciting but lots of hard work.

Tell your doctor how you are feeling and when you feel like pushing. This can feel different for everyone. **The doctor and nurses are there to help you through this time.**

Some babies are born by caesarean section.

Sometimes it is safer for a baby to be born by caesarean section. This is an operation to take the baby out through your tummy.

Ask your doctor to explain:

- **What is a caesarean section?**
- Why are some babies born by caesarean section?
- **Do you think I will need one?**

The Birth

When your baby is just about to be born, you need to get into the position that is most comfortable for you.

Positions you can give birth could be lying on your side, on your hands and knees, standing up or sometimes, on your back.

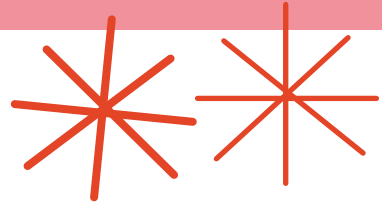
Talk with your midwife or doctor about the position that is most comfortable for you.

When the top of your baby's head starts to show, you might be asked to stop pushing – your midwife or doctor may want to slow things down.

As the baby's head begins to come out, you might feel pressure, and a stinging or burning feeling.

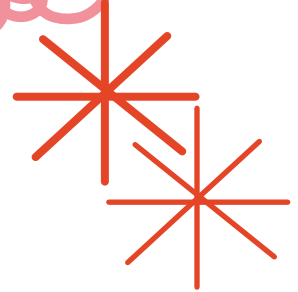
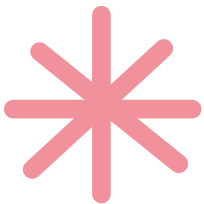
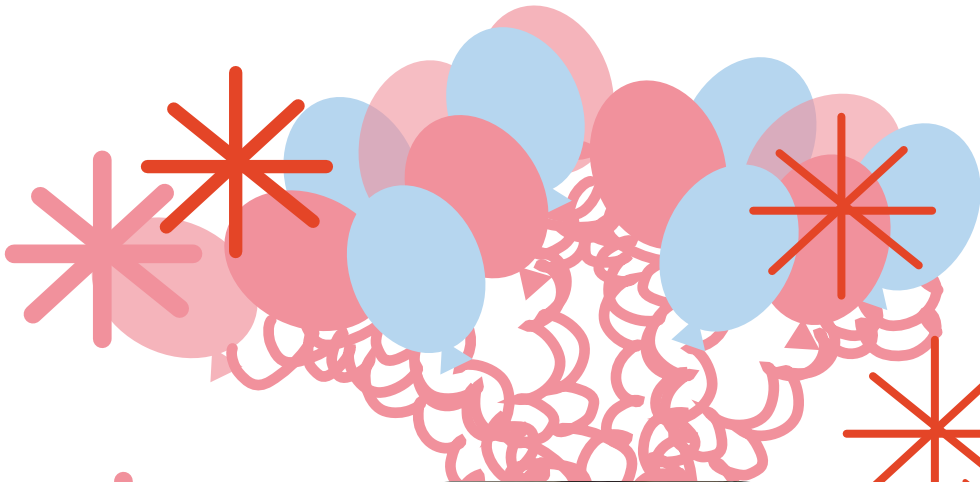
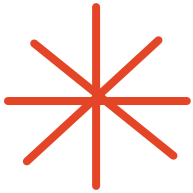
Once the head is through, the rest of the body just slides out.





CONGRATULATIONS

ON THE BIRTH OF
YOUR BEAUTIFUL BABY!



When Your Baby Is Born

When babies are born they sometimes look strange at first.

Some have blue or purple arms and feet, others have a funny shaped head. Often a baby's eyes are puffy or swollen.



All this is normal. These things go away over the next couple of hours or days.

Your doctor will give your baby to you soon after he or she is born. Being close to you is the best place for your baby. Cuddle your baby. A nurse or doctor will place a warm blanket over both of you to keep your baby warm.

Your doctor will check that everything is OK. The umbilical cord is cut. **This doesn't hurt the baby or you.**

A nurse or doctor will measure your baby's weight and length. Usually this is done in the room where you can watch and be involved. Babies don't like this part very much – their warm blanket is taken away, but only for a moment.



Soon after your baby is born, he or she will be looking for your breast. Your nurse or midwife will help with breastfeeding.



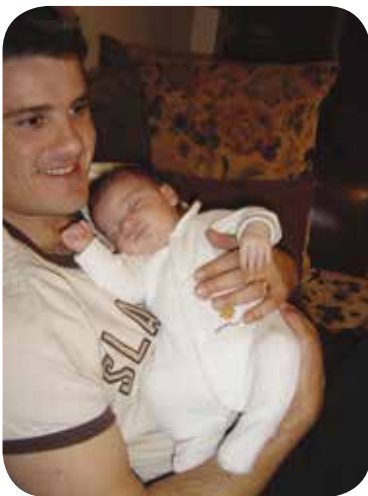
A tip: Family and friends love to know how much the baby weighs! So find out before you make any phone calls!

After The Birth

In the early days after birth you might be tired and have lots of different feelings. Sometimes you might feel very happy and excited. Other times you might feel sad and a bit down. These are all normal feelings, but it's important to talk about them.

Take time to rest and enjoy looking at your baby

Before the birth it's a good idea to talk to family and friends about visiting. It is best to have just a few visitors at one time. 'Showing off' your baby can be great! But it can be tiring too. **It's important to tell people if you or your baby want a break.**



About three days after birth some mums start crying – often they don't know why. This is called the baby blues. This feeling can last a few days, it's normal. It is good to talk to someone you trust about how you are feeling.

Check-ups

While you're in hospital, your doctor will make sure that you and your baby are healthy.

They may ask if it's OK to feel your tummy, look at the area around your vagina, and your breasts. They will ask you how you're feeling.

Before you take your baby home, he or she will have a health check. This may include a blood test and a hearing test.

Learning how to care for your baby

At the hospital, you will learn how to feed, bath and settle your baby. **The baby's father or your support person can learn too!** Ask all the questions that you can think of!



Remember those maternity (sanitary) pads!

For a week or more, there will also be a discharge coming out of your vagina. Some women say it's like a very heavy period. You will need to wear maternity (sanitary) pads. You should not use tampons at this time.

Don't be surprised if you think it has stopped and then it comes back. This might happen when you first go out to the shops, or walk to the park. So always keep a pad handy, or wear one out just in case.

Any discharge should be gone by 6 weeks after the birth.

If you have any very heavy bright red bleeding or a discharge that smells bad you need to tell your midwife or doctor.



Wetting!

After birth a lot of women can't help wetting themselves, when coughing, laughing or sneezing. The muscles that hold your pee in have been stretched!

There are exercises to help. Ask your doctor about these exercises. Make sure that you learn and **remember to do these exercises.** They are important.

How Long Will You Be In Hospital?

Most mums spend about three days in hospital before they take their baby home. If you or your baby need extra care, you may be in hospital a bit longer. You can ask about a doctor coming to visit you at home.

THINGS YOU CAN DO

- Talk to your doctor about how to cope with pain in labour
- Talk to your support person about what you want them to do
- Write down the phone number of the hospital so you can phone them
- When you phone the hospital and be ready to tell them what's happening
- Make sure someone is ready to drive you to the hospital at any time
- Keep calm relax and think about your breathing
- Make sure you have your bag packed
- Take a camera when you go to have your baby!
- Take the phone numbers of your family and friends

When you phone the hospital

Tell your doctor what is happening:

- Contractions and pain
- Fluid or blood loss
- Movements of your baby
- How far you are from the hospital





Tick any questions that you would like to ask your midwife or doctor

How do I know when to go to hospital?

How long will the birth take?

Will my baby move while I am in labour?

How do I time my contractions?

What will help with the pain?

How fast will it work?

Can I hold my baby straight away?

Will my baby stay with me?

Who cuts the cord?

Can my partner / support person stay with me?

How many people can I have in the room?

Can I take photos of the birth?

What is a caesarean birth?



LABOUR AND BIRTH

FIND A WORD FUN

V	E	U	M	B	I	L	I	C	A	L	C	O	R	D
D	U	H	J	R	G	W	D	R	T	N	O	S	I	I
H	A	R	D	E	H	E	E	S	E	V	N	S	L	S
F	U	M	L	A	L	E	C	G	M	A	T	T	A	C
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V	S	R	T	M	A	L	P	G	S	Y	G	I	L	E
W	H	O	L	E	G	R	A	S	N	B	R	E	E	D

It is good to talk to other mums about labour and birth. Remember that every labour is different. Women's bodies are very good at having babies!

Try to find the these **8 words** hidden in the puzzle above. **Talk to your doctor if you are not sure about what these words mean.**

contractions
premature
feelings
comfortable

breathing
discharge
umbilical cord
vagina

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



Healthy Start for Me and My Baby is one element of Healthy Start: A national capacity building strategy which aims to improve health and wellbeing outcomes for children whose parents have learning difficulties www.healthystart.net.au.

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www.sydney.edu.au/health-sciences/afdsrc



www.parentingrc.org.au

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www.fdsa.ualberta.ca