

Stages of Labor

Amberly Odom is pregnant with her second child.

“Last time it was very enjoyable, it was quick and easy, so if it could be like that again, that would be great.”

Every woman's labor is different.

“I think by the time I got to the hospital around 5 am I had a baby in my arms by 11am.”

Even from one pregnancy to the next.

“A lot of people say and there's some science that backs it up that your second labor is probably shorter by a third and the pushing is shorter by half.”

Tatum Morris is also pregnant with her second child.

“It's exhausting, so being prepared just like any sport that you have to be prepared for all of that. It's like, you know, playing a full basketball game and then you have overtime, then you have double overtime or triple overtime, you have to be ready for that both mentally and physically because you can go 14 hours.”

“The stages of labor are really divided up into three different categories.”

The best preparation is understanding the three stages of labor. The first of which is dilation.

“Your body is going from 0 to 10 centimeters, or 1 or 2 to 10 centimeters. It's when your cervix is making active change. There's two phases of that. There's the early phase of labor and the active phase of labor.”

“I'm dilated 4 centimeters now. So, hopefully when I go in.”

“We might see you tonight.” “I'm hoping.”

Amberly is in early labor, which is generally zero to 6 centimeters.

“Most women do okay during that early phase of labor and are able to tolerate it fairly well.”

“Early labor is when mom's still really excited, like this is it. You know, she's crampy, but they're not particularly close together.”

The early phase of labor can last from hours to a couple of days. To stay comfortable, you may want to: Go for a walk; Take a shower or bath; Listen to relaxing music; Use breathing and relaxation techniques; Change positions; Eat light foods and drink plenty of water.

The next phase is when you head to your labor and delivery facility.

“That's when most women are going to ask for pain medication, whether it be I/V narcotics or an epidural.”

For women who choose unmedicated childbirth.

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"This would be a good time to put her in some water if her birthplace has that to submerge that belly and give some relief, or put heat on her back, or do some hip squeezes or change position."

"However, if you've made it through that 30 minutes, and they still are saying, 'I can't do this, I don't want to do this,' then that's usually a good point where they say, 'I've tried.' And if they've tried extra hard for that extra amount of time, usually they're a little bit better at being okay with wanting the pain medicine at that point."

The next stage, stage two of labor, is when you push and deliver your baby.

"You've dilated to 10. You might have the urge to push or to bear down. Your care provider might do a vaginal exam to make sure that all the cervix is out of the way, and then you try to push out a baby."

Pushing can last minutes up to several hours or more. It may take longer for first-time moms or those who've had an epidural. At the end of this stage, your baby will be delivered and in your arms.

The third and final stage of labor, is delivery of the placenta, which typically take 5 to 30 minutes.

"The care provider helps deliver the placenta, and I think women are like, 'Oh gosh, I've got to push something else out?' But it's not as difficult as you would think, and it feels kind of good when it's out and then you're not officially pregnant anymore."

Some women don't have the option of a vaginal delivery and may need to schedule a birth by cesarean, or C-section, as Samantha Hudson has done.

"I will deliver in 2 weeks and 3 days."

Hers is a high-risk pregnancy so it's the safest option for Samantha and the baby.

"This is looking great. The baby's looking very happy in there."

A provider may also recommend a C-section if complications develop during a vaginal delivery.

"There's multiple reasons for C-sections, but you could divide them grossly into baby issues, you know, the baby's not tolerating labor, or maternal issues, the passageway's not big enough for the baby."

C-section is the most commonly performed surgery in the U.S. and is generally very safe. Still, it involves risks to both mom and baby so the procedure should be done only when necessary. Amberly is full term and her water broke, so her labor and delivery journey is about to begin.

"That's a healthy baby."