

The 3 Stages of Labor

You have a lot to look forward to! Soon, you will give birth and meet your baby. Childbirth is also called labor.

Labor has 3 stages. You will spend most of your time in the first stage, which can last up to 20 hours. Especially if you are having your first child. In stage 1, you start to have regular contractions of your uterus. These moments of discomfort help dilate, or widen, your cervix.

The cervix is the opening to your uterus. During labor, your baby will move out of your uterus, through the cervix, and down the birth canal, or vagina.

The first part of stage 1 is also known as “early labor.” As stage 1 continues, the contractions you feel will occur more often. They will also last longer and become stronger. You may start to feel more pain. This is sometimes referred to as “active labor.”

To help manage your pain, try things like massage, breathing exercises, or walking. You can also talk with your healthcare provider about other ways to control your pain, like medicine.

At some point during the first stage of labor, and sometimes before labor begins, your water will break. This is when the amniotic sac that surrounds your baby breaks and drains through your vagina.

The last part of stage 1 is known as “transitional labor.” This can be particularly intense and painful. Your contractions will come closer together, and you may feel the urge to push. Stage 2 starts when your cervix has fully dilated. It is now about 10 centimeters, or 4 inches, wide. This stage can last from 20 minutes to a few hours as your baby starts to leave your uterus headfirst.

Your provider may now ask you to push during each contraction. With each push, your baby will move farther down the birth canal.

When your provider finally sees your baby’s head, they will help guide them out. Stage 2 ends with the birth of your baby. After your baby is born, the umbilical cord is cut. The umbilical cord connects to the placenta.

During your pregnancy, this organ passed nutrients and oxygen from you to your baby. The third and final stage of labor is to deliver the placenta.

This third stage is the shortest. It may take from 5 to 30 minutes. You will have less painful contractions as the placenta leaves your body.

After all your hard work, you can now spend time getting to know your new baby!