

Chapter 8

Timeline of labour and birth

From 7 weeks

Braxton Hicks practice contractions are getting your body ready for labour – you won't feel them until later on, though.

In the third trimester

The hormone relaxin prepares your cervix, vagina and pelvic ligaments to make room for your baby.

36 weeks onwards

If it's your first baby, its head will drop into your pelvis, creating pressure on your cervix to encourage it to soften and open. This usually happens later in subsequent pregnancies.

37 weeks onwards

Braxton Hicks contractions will increase. You might feel more pressure in your cervix and vagina and perhaps some cramping. You may be hyperaware or unaware of these sensations.

your no guilt pregnancy plan

- Pre-labour** | If you are feeling lots of niggles, or are having
 | bouts of contractions that start and stop (often
 | disappearing when daylight appears) you could
 | be in pre-labour. See page 122 for more
 | information.
- Mucus plug** | As your cervix starts to change you may find a
 | blob of pink-streaked mucus in your pants or
 | when you wipe – this is sometimes called a
 | ‘show’. It’s been plugging your cervix but is no
 | longer needed as labour approaches. Expect
 | labour to start soon – ish! It could be a few
 | days yet . . .
- Early
labour** | You are en route to the real thing, but it’s early
 | days. You can still talk through contractions,
 | they are irregular and short. Employ distraction
 | techniques and alternate rest and movement. If
 | you are having a planned caesarean you’ll want
 | to alert your hospital and make your way over.
 | Some women experience phases of shakiness
 | and nausea as early labour starts and again as it
 | becomes established.
- Home** | Wherever you plan to give birth, you’ll probably
 | be at home for quite a bit of your labour.

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Waters breaking	<p>One in 10 women's waters break before labour. Nine in 10 will find that their waters break during labour or the pushing phase. Babies are occasionally born inside their amniotic sacs.</p>
Contractions	<p>The rhythmic tightening of your uterus that dilates (opens) your cervix in the first stage of labour feels different for everyone. Some describe it as intense period pain, others feel it more in their back or bottom, upper thighs and vagina. Six per cent of women in a recent survey described their birth as orgasmic. I've worked with women who experience their contractions as intense but euphoric rushes. Anything goes!</p>
Established labour	<p>The official definition of established labour is 3cm dilation onwards. Your contractions will usually be regular, longer, stronger and closer together than in early labour. You'll feel less like chatting.</p>
Water	<p>A shower or bath can help you feel comfortable and relaxed in labour – both at home and in hospital. See page 150 for information on using a birth pool for labour and birth. Remember to drink water during labour, particularly if it's a long one, and to keep urinating.</p>

your no guilt pregnancy plan

- Pain relief** : From breathing and TENS machines to epidurals, you can find out about the full range of ways to cope with labour on page 145. Whether you plan to avoid medical pain relief, or are keen for an early epidural, remember it's nobody's business but yours. And changing your mind in labour is fine too.
- Transition** : You might feel nauseous, shaky and fearful just before pushing starts (see page 127).
- Rest phase** : Some women experience a pause in their contractions between transition and pushing.
- Pushing** : It may creep up on you slowly, building from the end of contractions, or a sudden and overwhelming urge to push could hit. If you've had an epidural you may be less aware of these feelings, though the lower your baby is, the more you are likely to feel it.

time line of labour and birth

- Crowning** | The feeling of your baby's head emerging can
| be intense or pass you by entirely. See page 133
| for more information.
- Birth** | Whether it's smooth sailing or a bumpy ride,
| this is the moment you will meet your baby.
| Only you will know how it feels.