

Common Birthing Behaviors During the Stages of Labor

Below are listed some common birthing behaviors many pregnant people experience or that your partner may observe during your labor and birth. The behaviors described may occur very similar to this list or can be quite subtle or varied as each labor is unique. Remember that all behaviors are signs that things are quite normal and that labor is progressing.

Pre-Labor

- Nesting-cleaning, tidying, spurts of energy
- Wanting to turn inward, needing periods of quiet reflection
- Aware of subtle changes in the body
- Need of additional sleep

Early Labor

- Excitement, nervousness, restlessness, anticipation, increased energy
- Diarrhea
- Twinges, prickles or a “zing” sensation from the cervix deep inside the vagina
- Mild, inconsistent contractions
- Breaking of the bag of water (about 20% of pregnant people) with or without immediate contractions
- Mucous discharge: can be clear, pink, brownish, or blood tinged
- Walks around
- Makes conversation
- Makes eye contact
- May be unable to sleep
- Eats and drinks as usual
- Wants active companionship: conversation/distraction
- Able to do tasks such as washing dishes, cooking

Active Labor

- Turns attention inward toward physical sensations of contractions
- Decrease or stops eye contact and conversation
- Rests between contractions often with eyes closed
- Rests head on arms/pillows

- More comfortable upright or out of bed
- Is thirsty but gradually loses appetite for food
- Finds own comfort position and moves around less
- Needs companionship that is just present-unobtrusive, quiet, calm
- Pays attention to own breathing patterns
- Uses inward focus tools- sounds, encouraging self-talk, imagery
- Changes actions or behaviours somewhat reluctantly but will if necessary and encouraged to do so- appears more passive
- Breaking of the bag of water

Transition

- Shaking and vomiting are common
- Sudden changes in behavior patterns that were previously established
- May feel unable to manage, pushed to new territory beyond what they may feel capable of handling
- Fears may be verbalized about ability to continue
- May request pain relief medication
- Needs to move, try different measures, partners need to increase their involvement and connection, by words, holding, touch, or eye contact
- Increase of sounding
- Breaking of the bag of water is most common in this phase

Second Stage

- May have a “lull after the storm” of attaining complete dilation; the “rest and be thankful” period
- “Second wind” spurt of energy
- Sudden urge to empty bowels as baby descends
- Feels calmer
- Sense of purpose reappears
- Intensely introverted, focused on task that needs to be done
- Grips and needs physical support
- Drops toward the floor, bends and opens knees
- Sounds change to grunts, pushing noises
- Breaking of the bag of water (if not already broken)
- Feels “the ring of fire” as tissue around the vagina stretches during “crowning.”

Third Stage

- Highly focused attention on baby unless own physical needs dominate awareness
- May have feelings of elation, surprise, satisfaction, amazement in journey completed
- May have concerns regarding own condition, worries about baby if baby not with her
- Wants to sit upright to better see and hold baby
- Gently touches baby with fingertips and talks to baby in high pitched voice
- Much attention given to wanting eye contact with baby
- Gathers baby to breast
- Wants partner to connect, share, be present and involved with baby