



## *Labour: What to Expect and When to Page your Midwife*

### **Early Labour**

Most often women will have a period of labour that is called early or latent labour. During this time you will be having contractions but they may not be regular and will probably last less than 45 seconds. Their frequency, length and strength will vary depending on your position and activity. This stage of labour can last anywhere from a couple of hours to 24 hours or more. The most important thing about early labour is to ignore it as much as you can. Carry on with your normal activities and don't time your contractions.

Remember to:

- Eat and drink so that you will stay hydrated and have energy
- Rest as much as possible
- Have a warm bath to help you relax
- You can take gravol (50 mg) if you are having trouble sleeping (be sure not to take "natural" or "non-drowsy" gravol)
- You can take 1-2 acetaminophen (Tylenol) to help with any discomfort

Try not to be discouraged if the early part of labour lasts for many hours. This is an important part of labour as it helps thin, soften and open your cervix to about 3 cm. Don't stay awake to "keep labour going". If lying down and resting makes the contractions space out or go away, then your body is telling you that it needs that rest. We can only admit you to the hospital once we have determined that you are in active labour.

### **Active labour**

Characterized by contractions that:

- are 3-4 minutes apart (timing from the start of one contraction to the start of the next contraction)
- last 45 seconds or more
- are consistently strong, so that you are not able to walk or talk through the contraction
- have been this way for an hour

Page your midwife if you think you are in active labour. Although the above description is the typical experience for most women having their first baby, every woman labours differently. We encourage you to page your midwife at any time if you are distressed or have concerns. It is normal to have some bleeding in labour (when you wipe or a small amount on a pad). However, **if you are actively bleeding (blood running down your leg) page immediately.**

### **What if my water breaks?**

Most often, your water will break when you are already in well-established active labour, but sometimes it breaks as the first sign of labour or in early labour. When your water breaks, you need to note the following:

- Is the water clear? (It may have bits of blood or mucous in it, but the overall colour should be clear.)

- Does it have a bad smell?
- Is the baby moving?

During daytime hours, please page your midwife so that together you can make a plan. During the night, if you are GBS negative and the water is clear, does not smell badly and the baby is moving you should go back to bed and get some rest. You should not have a bath or put anything inside your vagina after your water breaks. Page your midwife in the morning or before that if you think you are in active labour.

**Page at any time if:**

- **you are GBS positive**
- **the water is coloured (brown, green, dark yellow or red)**
- **there is a bad smell**
- **the baby isn't moving**