

Latent Phase of Labour

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The latent first stage of labour

This information leaflet has been written to help you recognise some of the signs and symptoms you may experience at the start of your labour and offer some advice and tips to help you through the latent phase, sometimes referred to as the latent first stage of labour.

Labour is divided into three stages:

- The first stage of labour is when the neck of the womb (cervix) opens over a period of time, up to 10cms.
- The second stage of labour is when the baby moves down through the vagina and is born.
- The third stage is when the afterbirth (placenta) is delivered.

What is the latent phase of labour?

The latent phase of labour is the beginning of the first stage of your labour. It is the part when your cervix begins to ripen and open until it is 4cm dilated.

What to expect during the latent phase

You may experience backache, cramps, irregular contractions lasting 30-45 seconds which may last for a few hours then stop and start again the next day. Each woman's labour is unique and sometimes the latent phase can take a long time, particularly for first time mothers.

What are Braxton Hicks contractions?

Braxton Hicks can occur at any time during your pregnancy. They are the tightening of the muscle of the uterus which last for 30-60 seconds and may happen several times an hour, several times a day.

How can I tell the difference between Braxton Hicks and real labour contractions?

Labour contractions are noticeably longer, more regular, increase in frequency and are generally more painful than Braxton Hicks contractions.

What can you do to help yourself during the latent phase of labour?

Although every woman's labour is different and, therefore, we cannot provide you with specific times and detail, we do know that during the latent phase of labour it helps if you stay as relaxed as possible. Therefore, we encourage you to remain at home in comfortable surroundings as long as you can. Studies have shown that women who attend hospital in established labour are more likely to experience a normal labour and birth with less intervention.

There are things you can do at home to help cope with the latent phase, such as:

- Potter around the house or take a walk
- Watch television or read a book
- Take a warm bath or shower
- Have a nap or rest in bed
- Take paracetamol (no more than 8 tablets in 24 hours). Remember to inform your midwife of any medication that you have taken
- Try different positions that you feel most comfortable with; including sitting, standing, squatting, kneeling, laying on your left side or on all fours. Some women also find it relaxing to rock back and forth while standing. Remaining upright has been proven to help labour to progress
- Drink plenty of fluids. isotonic sports drinks are a good way of boosting energy levels while keeping you hydrated. **However, stimulant drinks containing caffeine should be avoided during pregnancy**
- Eat little and often, you will need your energy and as labour progresses your appetite will diminish
- Use a hot water bottle (wrap with a towel) on any areas that ache- your lower back, under your bump or between your thighs
- A cool gel pack may help backache
- Use breathing techniques. Keep your breathing slow and steady during a contraction. Focus on your breathing instead of the pain
- Continue with your daily routine. This is a great source of distraction and will prevent you from clock watching
- If you would like to use alternative therapies this would be the optimal time to do so

Birthing partners can also help by:

- Massage- you may have been shown in a parent craft class or if not, asking your birthing partner to massage your lower back it can be a great source of relief and also a good way to get them involved!
- They can provide you with light meals and encourage you to drink
- If you have a TENS machine your birthing partner can help you apply it
- Birthing partners can also make family and friends aware that you are in the latent phase of labour and encourage them to give support rather than raise concerns
- Keeping you company and helping you focus on the positive aspect of labour

When should you contact the hospital?

- You think you may be in the latent phase of labour and would like to discuss this with a midwife
- You think you may be in active phase of labour. Your contractions will become stronger and more frequent. They may last 45-60 seconds every 5 minutes or more
- You think your waters may have broken
- If you have any fresh red bleeding from your vagina
- If you think your baby's pattern of movement is reduced within a 24 hour period
- You have any concerns, worries or questions

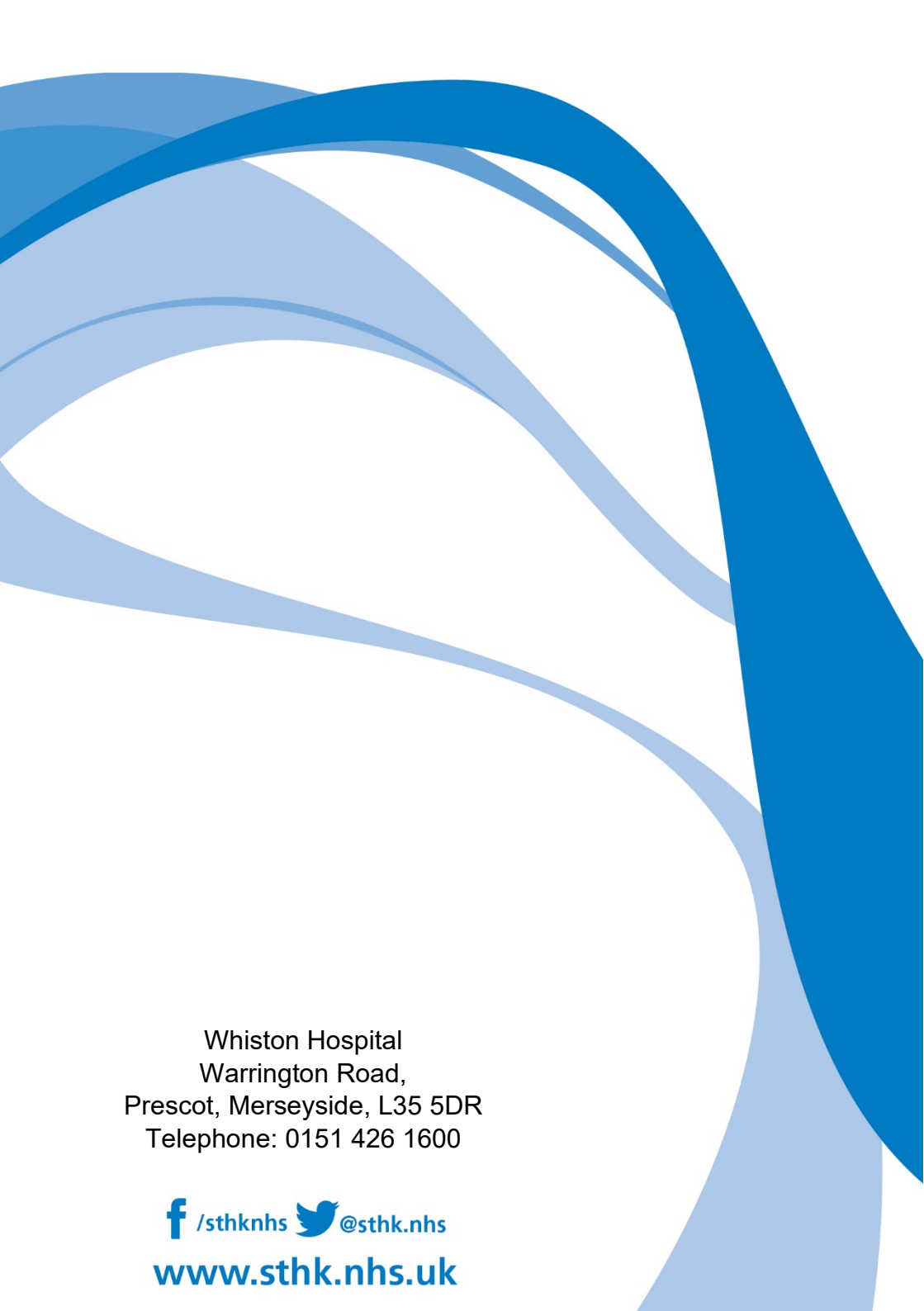
Useful websites

- www.nct.org.uk/birth/first-stage-labour
www.bounty.com/family/lifestyle/relationships

Contact Us

**You can contact us 24 hours a day, 7 days a week
on our Maternity Triage number:**

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