

How your partner can help.

We all know what Mum's job is during labour and birth, but by offering your support, you play a crucial role as well. Besides providing encouragement during labor and birth, you'll be the point person for all sorts of duties — from distractor-in-chief to cord-cutter!!

So, how can you prepare for what's bound to be a physically exhausting day for her and an emotional one for both of you? Check out these tips so you can proceed with patience and confidence during one of the most important days of your life.

Partner responsibilities during early labour.

Have a plan. It's always good to be prepared, so a few weeks before her estimated due date, map out the best route to the hospital (if that's where you're planning on birthing). I recommend doing a trial run so you're not caught by surprise on the day (or night), even if you're being guided by Google Maps, you can still make a wrong turn when you don't know the way. Top tip, you should definitely familiarize yourself with the environment you and your partner will in for hours, and maybe even days if her labour is lengthy or complicated. Join one of my Guided Tours of our Maternity Units (you can find dates and times on my website) Make a mental note of where the entrance and exit is located, the after-hours entrance is, whether there is a drop-off point, where parking is located,, where the labour and delivery units are, how to get there. and so much more!

Make sure your baby's capsule fits in your car, and make sure you know how to belt it in so that you're not stranded in the carpark wrestling with it while your newborn baby squalls uncomfortably in your partner's arms.

Pack the bags.

This is another do-ahead-of-time task that you'll both be grateful for when the contractions start. You may be staying overnight, too, so make sure both bags have a change of clothes and necessities.

Know your contractions... If you've attended antenatal classes together you will have a great idea of how these work, but it's smart to do a review so you know how to tell labour contractions from Braxton Hicks Contractions. ... and how to time them. When you contact your LMC, they'll ask how often the contractions are coming. So one way to offer your partner support in early labor is by helping to time them. To do that, time the intervals between contractions from the start of one to the beginning of the next. It's also a good idea to put your LMC's number on your phone (if you haven't already).

Offer distractions.

If you know going in, that this might be a really long day, you'll be better able to manage your (and your partner's) expectations. So, keep in mind that spending 8-plus hours in labour is not unusual for first-time mums. Here's where you come in: Break out some games, stream an episode of your favorite movie or reality show (if you can focus) or take a stroll down the hall if she's up for it.

Do not complain or act bored - no yawning!!!! I've heard many dads complain about a sore back because they've been standing next to their partners for so long. Sorry, but your partner doesn't care if you have a sore back or feet and she doesn't need to be asked why are things taking so long!

Spread the Zen.

Your most important job is to keep your partner relaxed, so keep calm yourself. Do some progressive muscle relaxation exercises together or even a short mindfulness exercise. Or if she'll let you, gently massage her head or back, and hold her hand during those really rough contractions.

Read up on the stages of labour. Early labour is just that — your partner's contractions are still mild or moderate, spaced out around 20 minutes and not necessarily consistent. This can go on for hours or even days. But once those contractions become more intense and last about 40 to 60 seconds, she's likely entering active labor. Now's the time to call her provider, who'll probably tell you to head to the hospital.



Expect the unexpected, be flexible and be ready for action.

Labour doesn't always go to plan, and birth plans sometimes go out the window if there are complications. Also, your partner might change her mind about what kind of pain relief she wants - she may have said before labour that she wanted no pain relief, but might decide she wants an epidural after being in labour for a while. This is her choice, so be flexible and allow her to do what she needs to do in order to be comfortable and cope. Support her choices. Also, her needs during labour may change - at the beginning, she may want lots of touching and encouragement, and as the experience intensifies, she might withdraw and become very internally focused, ignoring you. This is totally normal. Being ready for action may mean massaging your partner's neck, shoulders, and back, helping her to pace the halls in order to try to get labour going, helping her to change labouring positions, timing contractions, placing a cold cloth on her forehead (and keeping it cool), moistening her lips with ice or lip balm, offering her ice chips or water, holding a mirror so that she can see the baby's head crowning, holding her leg or foot while she pushes, or telling her what is happening if she has a caesarean or epidural (since she won't be able to see). If you want to, you may be able to catch your baby while it is being born - wow!!!

Be her advocate.

During labor, your normally take-charge partner may not be able to speak up for herself, so be ready to be assertive on her behalf. If something is happening and if your partner or you don't understand what is going on or why, ask questions and make sure you're both given an opportunity to respond to any interventions or medical decisions if she is able. If she needs help, get it for her. If something seems to be wrong or if she's not coping, tell her LMC.

And her low-key cheerleader.

If your partner wants to switch on the TV and switch it off five minutes later, humor her. If she wants you to go get her some ice chips, hop to it. Praise her efforts (unless it gets on her nerves) or sympathize. If she wants a massage, give it. If her feet are cold, find the socks and put them on her. And if she's hot, cool her down with a damp washcloth over her face and body.

Don't take anything personally.

If your partner is critical or aggressive in the heat of labour, try not to get upset - this often happens when the pain is very intense, especially near the time of transition (right before she will feel the urge to push). You have an important role, even if it's giving her the space she wants.

Giving birth may be a bit messy.

Your partner may even have a bowel movement as they're pushing. They'll probably make primal noises you've never heard before. Your job, no matter how unsettled you may feel, is to say this: "You're doing great!" Actually, they're not even paying attention to your words. It's your familiar voice and reassuring tone that they're tuning in. Give your all when she begins to push. Support her body while she pushes and keep mopping her face. Small gestures will keep your partner going. You could give her an update, too, so she knows when the baby's head is crowning (if she can't see for herself in the mirror).

Remember yourself.

You may get so caught up in the labour process that you forget to eat, drink, go to the toilet, or take a moment to catch your breath. Try to take breaks when you can (for example, if your partner manages to get some sleep after having an epidural, take the opportunity to grab some zzz's as well). If you've been up all night while she was in labour, call a taxi or a relative to take you home to shower, change, and sleep - don't drive if you haven't had any sleep the night before.

When it's all over and you're holding your precious new baby, be conscious of what your partner has just accomplished. She deserves a little, not a lot of recognition for making it through labour and delivery, not to mention nine months of pregnancy. No need to break the bank with a blingy "push" present if that's not your style, but taking the time to write a loving note of appreciation or a small gift will be meaningful to her.

