

# How Partners Can Offer Support and Encouragement During Labor

When her due date finally rolls around, your main goals are to stay calm and help Mom.

We all know what Mom's job is during childbirth, but by offering your support, you play a crucial role as well. Besides providing encouragement during labor and delivery, you'll be the point person for all sorts of duties.

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 lives.

## Partner responsibilities during early labor

**Have a plan.** It's always good to be prepared, so a few weeks before her due date, ensure you know how you will get to the hospital. Regardless of whether you'll be driving yourself or taking a cab, or having a family member or friend get you there, it is important to have that plan ready. Now is also the time to [install the infant car seat](#), which can be tricky. You'll need it when you drive your bundle home.

**Pack the bags.** This is another do-ahead-of-time task that you'll both be grateful for when the contractions come. You may be staying overnight, too, so make sure both bags have a change of underwear, toiletries, your phone charger, an extra pair of socks and a hoodie or sweater (hospitals can be drafty). Remember to take your car seat. Don't forget your health card, as you will need this when you register at the hospital!

### Know your contractions...

Here's a childbirth-for-partners cheat sheet: Braxton Hicks contractions don't happen regularly — they come and go, may last 30 seconds or up to two minutes and may subside when your partner changes positions. True Labour Contractions have a pattern, get stronger, longer and closer together as time goes on. You can help your partner by timing the space between contractions and the length of the contractions, she will know when they are feeling stronger.

### How to Time Contractions.

When you call the hospital, they may 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. There are apps that you can download to use for keeping track.

### 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 10-plus hours in labor is not unusual for first-time moms (though research shows five to seven hours can also be typical). Here's where you

come in: Break out some games, stream an episode of your favorite sitcom or reality show (if you can focus) or take a stroll down the hall if she's up for it. TV's are available to rent in the rooms, you may bring your own laptop and use the Wifi provided by the hospital. Don't forget your cell phones and charge cords.

### **Be Calm and Supportive**

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.

## **How partners can offer support at the hospital**

### Physical support

- Help with mother's comfort during labour
- During contraction, use the 3 T's - Touch, talking, and timing contractions
- Between contractions offer sips of water, cool cloths and comforting words
- Pain relief is a personal choice; support mother's decision



### Emotional support – just be there!

- Be positive
- Reassure and encourage
- Support mother's wishes

### **Expect the unexpected.**

Keep an open mind, how you think you want your labour and delivery to go, may change. No one — not even the most experienced obstetrician — can predict exactly how your partner's labor and delivery will go. For example, you two may have discussed a delivery without medication, but things can change as labor progresses.

### **Be her 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, know where to get them, what she needs and wants will be an ongoing changing process. Praise her efforts. If she wants a massage, give it. If her feet are cold, find the socks and put them on her (or grab a pair from the nurse). And if she's hot, cool her down with a damp washcloth over her face and body.

### **Don't take anything personally.**

You're going to feel that you're in the way once the doctor and labor nurse take over — and totally unwanted if your partner snaps at you. But you have an important role, even if it's giving her the space she wants. What to say to someone in labor? Sometimes it's nothing. Instead, breathe through the contractions with her, mop her forehead and let her squeeze your hand. Just being in the room, can be enough and all she needs, again these needs and wants will change during the labour and delivery stages.

### **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. The nurses may ask you to help support her legs, help her to change positions. Being at her side to encourage her is important.

### **When the baby arrives.**

The doctor and nurse will ask if you are wanting to cut the cord, this is a personal decision you can think about ahead of time, but again it's okay if you change your mind either way in the moment.

### **Thank her.**

When it's all over and you're holding your brand-new baby, be conscious of what your partner has just accomplished. She deserves a lot of recognition for making it through labor and delivery, not to mention nine months of pregnancy.



### **Initial Hours after Delivery...**

Provide skin to skin bonding time with your new baby, when mom is sleeping between feeding the baby, it's your turn to cuddle with your new little one and get to know them. The nurses will show you how to change diapers and how to bath your baby for the first time. You can help mom with position changes, getting supplies that she needs and walking beside her to the bathroom, in the hall and helping to position the baby for feeding.

### **Going Home..**

Life has forever changed. It will take time to adjust and figure out a new normal, a new schedule, support each other during this time. Take turns sleeping, holding and caring for the baby. Sleep when the baby sleeps. Mom's job in the first 6 weeks is to establish breastfeeding, this will take a lot of time and energy. Partners can help by doing the dishes, doing the laundry, tidy the house, get the groceries and making meals. Have family and friends help with these tasks as needed.

- Listen to new mother talk about labour and birth

- Mothers need to debrief with those who support them.
- Help with care of mother and baby
- Learn together about the care of baby
- Hold baby between feedings so that mother can sleep
- Know when mother and baby need quiet time
- Limit visitors so mother and baby can rest

## This One's For the Dads

The dads who change the 3 a.m. diapers and [hand you the baby](#) to nurse.

The dads who provide the birth support you so desperately need.

The dads who help you step into mesh underwear and unwrap the pad for you with understanding eyes.

The dads who assist you out of bed, place their hand on your back while walking the hospital hall.

The dads who are [the rock for the whole family](#), entertaining the kids while tossing in a load of laundry.

The dads who wipe the postpartum hormonal tears and don't ask why you are crying.

The dads who bag the breast milk, who make the bottles, and burp the baby, too.

The dads who are just as tired themselves but won't say because they  
want everyone to be cared for.

The dads who look at your changed body, unkempt hair, milk-stained  
shirt and genuinely [tell you how beautiful](#) you really are.

It's the [dads like you](#) who play more of a part than we moms can ever express to  
you.

So thank you over and over, dads.

We moms, we see you, we appreciate you.

Visit: [dadcentral.ca](http://dadcentral.ca)