

Tips for Coping with Labor at the Hospital

Wear Comfortable Clothes

You can wear a hospital gown. However, wearing your own clothes might help you feel more relaxed and comfortable. As labor progresses, you'll be working hard. Wear something that is loose and lightweight. If you get chilly, add a sweater or blanket.

Make Yourself at Home

Make the labor room your own.

- Arrange the chairs so you can be close to your partner.
- Open or shut the curtains.
- Turn the lights up or down
- Play your favorite music.
- Turn the television on or off.
- Unpack your labor bag.
- When you decide to get into bed, raise or lower it into a comfortable position. Arrange the pillows and get more if you need them.

Share Your Birth Plan

If you have a birth plan, share it with your nurse. Ask her to put a copy of it in your chart if one isn't already there.

- Talk about your coping style and the comfort measures you'd like to try.
- Explain how she can help support you.

Ask for What You Want and Need

The nurses and staff want to help you.

- Ask them for suggestions when you feel "stuck." They can recommend positions and comfort measures.
- When you'd like to be alone with your partner, tell the staff and your visitors.
- It's important that you feel you can share your concerns with your nurse. Ask to speak to the charge nurse if you are having trouble working with your nurse.

Move

Moving and changing positions can help speed your labor. It may also help you baby get into a better position for birth. Moving can help your body stay as comfortable as possible. Being tense and lying in the same position for a long time can slow labor and make it more painful.

- Walk around the room.
- Rock in a chair or on a birthing ball.
- Sit upright on a chair, birthing ball or toilet.
- Kneel on all fours.
- Lie on your side.
- Stand and lean forward on your partner, bed or a birthing ball.
- Squat and hold onto the bed or lean back against your partner, who supports you under the arms and takes all your weight.

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If You Decide to Use Pain Medicine

If you aren't able to get into a new rhythm to cope with the contractions, find out what pain medicines are an option. If you decide to use pain medicine, make sure you:

- continue to use coping techniques
- ask for emotional support and attention from your labor companion or nurse.

If You Have Pitocin (Oxytocin)

Pitocin is a medicine that stimulates uterine contractions. It is given through the intravenous (IV) line in your hand or arm to induce labor or improve its progress. It may also be given to reduce bleeding after birth.

To induce labor, a nurse will increase your Pitocin rate about every 40 minutes until you are in active labor. You will probably have to stay in or near your bed or chair because you and your baby need to be monitored.

Your IV will stay in place during your whole labor. It is usually removed after the recovery period when your health care team feels you no longer need it.

Contractions may quickly become intense when Pitocin is used. To help you cope:

- you may need to change your breathing and use more comfort measures
- ask your partner or labor companion to use touch techniques like stroking or massage between contractions
- focus on getting relaxed between contractions, even if you find it hard to relax during them.

If You Have Back Pressure and Pain

The back of your baby's head is toward your spine, which may cause back pressure and pain.

As a result, labor is likely to take longer even though there are strong contractions. This is because the baby usually has to turn to face your back in order to fit through your pelvis.

- Try positions that get you upright or leaning forward. They help get your baby off your spine as well as help you baby turn.
- Try walking, stair climbing, lunging, slow dancing with your partner, pelvic rocking on hands and knees, and laboring over a birthing ball.
- If you must stay in bed, ask your nurse or health care provider for positions you can use to help turn your baby.
- Ask your labor companion to press on your lower back using the heel of a hand, a rolling pin, paint roller, tennis ball or frozen juice container.
- Sit and press your back against your clenched fists.
- Try alternating warm and cold packs.
- Some health care providers offer injections (shots) of sterile water that may help to block the pain.