

Practices That Support Normal Birth

(from Lamaze International)

Every birth has its own unexpected twists and turns – and yours probably will too! But there are some things you can do to help your delivery be as normal as possible. Ask your health care provider to work with you to make these practices possible.

1) Labor Begins on Its Own

Letting your body go into labor spontaneously is almost always the best way to know that your baby is ready to be born and that your body is ready for labor. In the vast majority of pregnancies, labor will start only when all the players – your baby, your uterus, your hormones, and your placenta – are ready. Naturally, labor usually goes better and mother and baby usually end up healthier when all systems are go for birth. Every day of the last weeks of pregnancy is vital to your baby's and body's preparation for birth.

If your labor is induced (started artificially), it becomes a medical event and proceeds quite differently from spontaneous labor. Unless you or your baby has a health problem that necessitates induction, it makes sense to wait patiently for your labor to start on its own. Even if your due date has passed and you're longing to hold your baby, remember that nature has good reasons for the wait.

2) Freedom of Movement throughout Labor

Moving in labor serves two very important purposes. First, it helps you cope with increasingly strong and painful contractions, which signals your body to keep labor going. Second, it helps gently wiggle your baby into your pelvis and through your birth canal.

3) Continuous Emotional and Physical Support

In childbirth, as in many aspects of life, we humans do better when we're surrounded by those we trust, people who tell us we're doing well and encourage us forward. Good labor support is not watching the clock and checking IV lines and fetal monitor printouts. It's making sure you're not disturbed, respecting the time that labor takes, and reminding you that you know how to birth your baby. Your helpers should spin a cocoon around you while you're in labor – create a space where you feel safe and secure and can do the hard work of labor without worry.

4) No Routine Interventions

Although research shows that routine and unnecessary interference in the natural process of labor and birth is not likely to be beneficial – and may indeed be harmful – most U.S. births today are intervention-intensive. A majority of women surveyed for Listening to Mothers experienced one or more of the following interventions during labor:

- Continuous electronic fetal monitoring (93%)
- Restrictions on eating (87%)
- IV fluids (86%)
- Restrictions on drinking (66%)
- Episiotomy (35%)
- Epidural anesthesia (63%)
- Artificially ruptured membranes (55%)
- Artificial oxytocin augmentation (53%)
- Cesarean surgery (24%)

5) Spontaneous Pushing in Non-Supine (Upright and Side-Lying) Positions

When it's time to push your baby out, remember that instinct, tradition, and science are all on your side. Current evidence shows that letting you assume whatever position you find most comfortable, encouraging you to push in response to what you feel, and letting you push as long as you and your baby are doing well are all beneficial practices

6) No Separation of Mother and Baby with Unlimited Opportunity to Breastfeed

Experts now recommend that right after birth, a healthy newborn should be placed skin-to-skin on the mother's abdomen or chest and should be dried and covered with warm blankets. Any care that needs to be done immediately after birth can be done with your baby skin-to-skin on your chest.