

Stages of Labor

In maternity nursing, you will learn the stages of labor. As a nursing student, you must be familiar with each stage of labor and the nursing interventions based on the specific stage of labor.

In this lesson, you will be able to learn the following:

- what occurs in each stage of labor
- be able to identify each stage based on its description
- cervical dilation ranges in each phase of stage 1 and contraction length and frequency
- nursing interventions for each stage
- delivery mechanisms (Duncan or Schultz)
- changes in the perineum that the baby is about to be delivered
- Signs the placenta is about to be delivered

Stage 1 of Labor

Goal: Cervical dilation (opening) **0-10 cm & 100% effacement** (thinning) due to contractions.

Facts:

- Longest Stage (especially for first-time mothers or nulliparous)
- Has 3 Phases
- Starts with TRUE Labor

Phases: Early Labor (Latent), Active, and Transition

Remember the mnemonic: "Labor is Actively Transitioning"

Phase 1: Early labor (Latent)

- Cervix dilates from **1 to 4 cm** and thins
 - **0-6 cm** - ACOG.org (The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists) has recommended guideline changes for cervical dilation for the stages of labor.
- Contractions occur **every 5 to 30 minutes and 30-45 seconds in length**
- Contractions are less intense compared to other phases and stages
- Longest of the phases (especially first time mothers >20 hours vs >14 multipara). Some women notice contractions while others don't (can gradually occur over 8-12 hours or 1-3 days)
- If the mother is at home, should monitor contraction duration and intensity. Try to stay comfortable at home until water breaks or enters the active phase of labor.

The mother will be talking, excited, and nervous.

Phase 2: Active Labor

- Cervix dilates to **4 to 7 cm** and thins
 - **Starts at 6 cm (instead of 4 cm)** - ACOG.org (The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists) has recommended guideline changes for cervical dilation for the stages of labor.
- Contractions will be noticeably stronger and longer (**45 to 60 seconds**) every **3 to 5 minutes**
- Lasts about 4 to 8 hours
- If the mother is at home, time to go to the hospital.
- Water may break (if hasn't already)

- Important to monitor for **meconium-stained fluid** which is greenish brown/yellowish amniotic fluid. Baby can aspirate this into lungs causing infection or blocking airway and this usually indicates fetal distress)
- Perform **Nitrazine paper test** to confirm the water has broke (turns blue if positive)

Interventions:

- Provide comfort (non-pharmacological and pharmacology).
- **Non-pharmacological:** changing positions, warm shower or bath, massages between contractions, breathing techniques, ice or fluids for dry mouth.
- **Pharmacological:** epidural etc.
- Encourage frequent urination to keep bladder empty (full bladder prevents uterus from contracting properly and can slow down labor), monitor vitals of mother and fetal heart rate.

Mother will be serious, anxious, and in pain.

Phase 3: Transition

This phase will lead into Stage 2 where the baby will be delivered.

- Cervix dilates to **8 to 10 cm** and thins
- Shortest phase but most intense/painful
- Lasts 30 minutes to 2 hours (longer for first time mothers)
- Contractions will be very intense and long (back to back contractions) 60-90 seconds length every 2-3 minutes.
- Mother will be concentrating, irritated, pain, nauseous, shivering.
- May report intense pressure (bowel movement) due to baby pushing down...don't want the mother to start pushing until fully dilated because it can cause swelling of the cervix...hence it won't fully dilate.

Interventions:

- provide support
- breathing techniques
- encouragement
- monitoring mother's vitals and fetal heart rate (esp. during contractions, and before, and after. Normal fetal heart rate - 110 to 160 bpm)
- mother's contractions (length, frequency)
- monitoring status of cervix (dilation and effacement)
- assessing fetal position and station (station 0 baby head is engaged and at ischial spine). The ischial spine is the narrowest part of the pelvis.

Stage 2 of Labor

Starts when the cervix has fully dilated and ends when the baby is fully delivered.

- Cervix is fully dilated so the baby can start descending into the birth canal (the mother will have intense pressure in rectum as the baby descends). Watch fetal station +1 to +5 (+5 is head crowning).
- Contractions will be strong and intense like in the transition period (60-90 seconds length every 2-3 minutes).

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Roman Wölfel



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