

Third and Fourth Stages of Labor



The baby is here in your arms! You're in love! Now what??

- ◆ First, the baby must breathe. Most do this completely on their own with no intervention from me, and I try not to do anything that is unnecessary. Baby's head needs to stay facing straight forward to keep the soft cartilage in the throat open at first. If needed, I rub the baby's back to stimulate nerves to the diaphragm. Every once in a while, a couple of breaths with the bag and mask and/or oxygen is needed.
- ◆ I can assess everything while baby is on your chest; there is no need to take him or her away from you. I can listen to his heart and lungs, check his color, assess his well-being, and even give oxygen, all with minimal disturbance to you.
- ◆ At 1 and 5 minutes, the Apgar score is assessed. It measures respiratory effort, color, heart rate, reflex activity and tone, which indicates baby's state of wellbeing.
- ◆ I will dry your baby off, or cover baby as needed, change blankets as necessary.

Third stage

- ◆ This is from delivery of the baby to delivery of the placenta. This process can take minutes, or well over an hour. There is no hurry.
- ◆ Often you feel painful contractions again and a "heaviness" that are both relieved by the passage of the placenta. I help it out but do not force it.
- ◆ The uterus must contract strongly to detach the placenta and clamp down the open blood vessels that have been supplying the placenta. I need to check often that your uterus is clamping down as it should and that there is no blood built up inside. It can be painful when I check this; I try hard to keep discomfort to a minimum.
- ◆ I will use Pitocin, other meds, and/or herbal tinctures if you are bleeding too much!
- ◆ Your placenta will be inspected to make sure it is normal and complete, and I will show it to you. If you plan to encapsulate, it will be frozen or refrigerated quickly.
- ◆ At some point, the cord may be clamped and cut. This is done only after the cord stops pulsating and/or after delivery of the placenta. The longer we wait, the better. If you chose a lotus birth, the placenta will be prepared with sea salt and herbs.

Fourth stage

- ◆ This is the stabilization of mom and baby. The immediate stabilization is for 2-3 hours after birth (I stay for this) and then I check on you again at 24-72 hours.
- ◆ I get you cleaned up, dry and comfortable. If you have any vaginal tears which would benefit from suturing, I will do this for you now, with a local anesthetic. You will be monitored to make sure that your uterus is firm and bleeding is minimal.
- ◆ Nursing and bonding are the most important activities for the first minutes, hours and days of your baby's life. Everything that I do and recommend supports this. Adequate nursing is the best way to gauge baby's health and provide necessary stimuli and nutrition. Nursing early and often encourages successful breastfeeding.

Resting and bonding

- ◆ Your baby's job is to learn to breathe, eat and interact with you. He or she does this through nursing as much as possible, being on or next to mom and/or dad, having lights and voices low, pooping and sleeping.
- ◆ Mom's job is to make sure she is available to provide food, warmth, and comfort to her baby. She can do this by nursing frequently, resting, eating well, holding her baby often, and reducing stimuli to her baby. Your baby's day and night is often mixed up, so be sure to sleep when he or she sleeps!
- ◆ Dad/partner's job is to make sure mom and baby are able to do their jobs and to bond with his new family. He needs to make sure that mom is able to rest, has food prepared for her and brought to her if needed, has someone to look after the other children or pets, and has household chores done. Right now the mother needs to be mothered and to get rest, not entertain visitors or spend time talking to anyone but her baby, so dad gets the important job of keeping visitors at bay! He needs to be free to lavish love and attention on his wife and baby and relish in the bonding.
- ◆ Other family and friends' job is to be helpful around the house so that the new family can bond and take care of each other's emotional and physical needs.
- ◆ Visitors should be kept to a minimum because they bring micro-organisms and over-stimulation. Be very prudent about who you allow to visit and keep visits to under 20 minutes. We have a semi-humorous Visitor Instructions for New Families notice that can help your visitors to understand and appreciate this without hurt feelings.
- ◆ You will bleed like a heavy period during the first 24 hours, then it will slow quite a bit and should stop being bright fresh red blood. Drinking lots of water and emptying your bladder frequently will help your uterus contract well. Until bleeding stops completely, you still have an open wound deep inside and an open cervix. That is why we recommend no tub baths (sitz baths for perineal care are ok), no intercourse, and no exercise more vigorous than a brief stroll until after 3 weeks AND cessation of all bleeding for 4 days.
- ◆ Breastfeeding, breastfeeding and more breastfeeding! Newborns need to nurse no less than once **every 2 hours** including at night, and more often is better because mothers milk digests completely in less than 2 hours. Newborn stomachs are tiny, and can only hold a few drops of the precious colostrum that you make before your milk comes in, so nursing often prevents them from becoming hypoglycemic and dehydrated, and also stimulates your breasts to start producing milk. If baby is lethargic and difficult to wake up to nurse, it is usually because their blood sugars are low, which makes it all the more important to get a few drops of colostrum into them. If feeding them often is not making them perk up, call me.
- ◆ Did I mention enough times that everyone's job is to make breastfeeding successful and possible? This is your baby's best bet (well, after homebirth!) for being healthy in the short and long-term. I am open to questions at any time and want to make mothering a happy and successful relationship for you and your family.