

Tips for the labour and birth support person



the women's
the royal women's hospital

This information will help you care for and support someone while they're in labour, whether they're giving birth vaginally or by caesarean section.

Being a support person for labour and/or birth is really important. Support can come from a partner, family member, friend, doula, disability support worker, student midwife, and your midwife.

Research shows that having a familiar support person present can help to shorten labour, reduce the need for pain relief medicines and contribute to a positive birth experience.

As a labour support person, remember that labour is a natural process. Contractions can be intense, and labour takes time. Every labour and birth are different.

Some people choose to have more than one support person. However, be aware that some situations might limit the number of people allowed in the birthplace.

During pregnancy, do these things together, if possible, to prepare for birth

- Attend childbirth education programs
- Learn about labour, birth and early parenting
- Create a labour soundtrack or playlist with music the birthing person enjoys
- Practise deep breathing exercises, visualisations and birth affirmations, like "I feel confident" and "I feel safe"
- Exercise gently together
- Consider writing a birth plan or map.

Prepare items that might help during labour, whether you're at home or in the hospital

- Heat/cool packs (hospitals provide these)

- Massage oil
- Essential oil and diffuser (sometimes available in hospital)
- Candles (bring battery candles into hospital)
- Large scarf to put over hips and help with gentle rocking
- Massage tools
- Hair comb for use on hand pressure points
- Lip balm and hair ties
- Spray bottle with water
- Plan nourishing snacks to bring for labour (there's a small fridge in the birth centre rooms)
- Fully charged phone or camera
- Soundtrack or playlist (hospital provides speakers)
- Throw rug and pillow for comfort and familiarity
- Comfortable clothes
- Affirmations, photos, or mood board (images to help relax, focus and feel good).

Practical ways to support the labouring person

- Time the contractions and offer guidance
- Offer fluids that maintain hydration and electrolyte balance
- Set up and maintain the birth space, including lighting, music, props and privacy
- Know the directions to the hospital, and if you're driving, know where you can park
- Handle incoming calls and messages, and keep the phone on silent

- Take pictures to capture memories - ask the birthing person and staff if this is ok
- Communicate with the healthcare team and be an advocate if/when necessary.

Support the birth person physically

- Ask if they'd like a massage, but keep in mind they may not want to be touched
- Guide them through the breathing and relaxation techniques you've practised together
- Encourage them to use sound during contractions, like sighing when breathing out
- Apply a cold cloth or warm pack when needed
- Encourage them to use the shower or bath as labour intensifies (if appropriate)
- Help them change positions and set up any props - like a gym ball or yoga mat
- Help them add movement to positions - walking, slow dancing, rocking or rotating on a gym ball.
- Ask the midwife for tips.

Support them emotionally

- Give them personal space if they ask, but stay nearby and available
- Listen to their requests and respond willingly
- Stay calm and confident, as your presence is sometimes all that's needed
- Take a break, especially if you feel anxious.

Support them with love and care

- Gently touch them
- Hold their hands, especially during any procedures
- Provide positive encouragement and loving comments
- Make gentle eye contact and hold it with them during intense contractions, if they can (if appropriate).

Use supportive language

- Choose your words carefully to help normalise the experience
- During strong contractions, keep words simple, like "keep going" or "nearly there"
- Offer simple choices to make decision-making easier - this helps them focus on what their body needs. Remember, the birth plan or map already outlines their preferences
- Show respect to them and the people around you, even if you feel worried or scared.

Self-care tips for you during labour

- Make sure you eat and drink regularly
- Take short breaks if needed and when appropriate
- Call a friend to debrief or refocus
- Use deep breathing to stay calm
- Look after your back when helping to support
- Rest when possible.

Throughout the labour and birth

- Be flexible
- Understand the birth process and the birth plan or map
- Help them to make informed decisions
Take pride in sharing this experience together.

Family Violence Support

1800 Respect National Helpline

Support for people impacted by sexual assault, domestic or family violence and abuse.

1800 737 732 (24-hour support service)

1800respect.org.au

Do you need an interpreter?



If you need an interpreter, remember you can ask for one.

Disclaimer: This fact sheet provides general information only. For specific advice about your or your baby's healthcare needs, you should seek advice from your health professional. The Royal Women's Hospital does not accept any responsibility for loss or damage arising from your reliance on this fact sheet instead of seeing a health professional. If you or your baby require urgent medical attention, please contact your nearest emergency department.
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