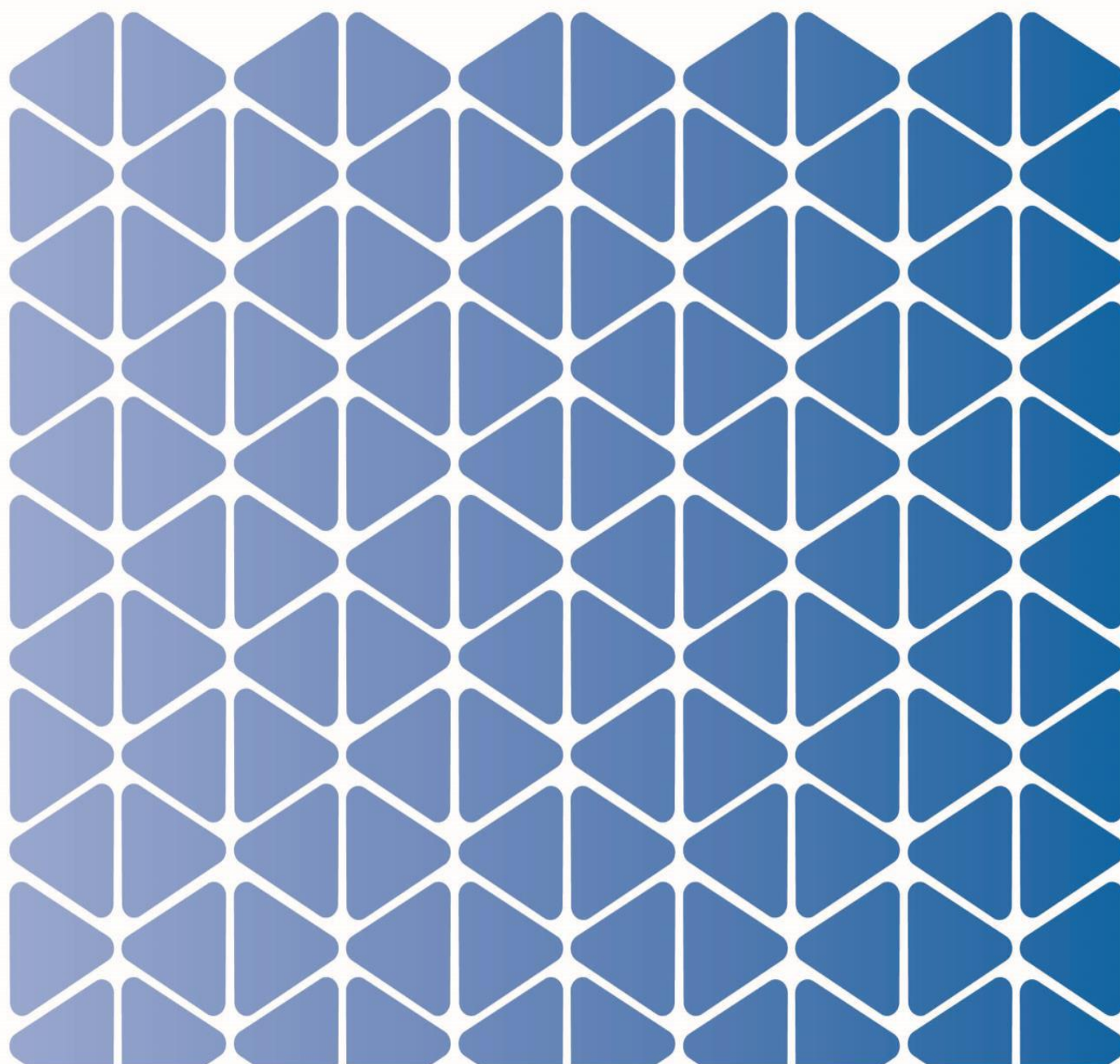


PATIENT INFORMATION

Latent Phase of Labour



Early signs of labour and the latent phase.

Working out whether you are in the early stages of labour or not, can be very confusing. This information has been produced to help you and give you the confidence in yourself and in what is happening to you and your baby.

Every labour is different and sometimes the latent phase can take many hours, or even days this is perfectly normal.

If you think you are in the early stages of labour, the main thing to remember is to stay calm and relaxed.

This information will answer some of your questions and give you lots of suggestions to help you through the early part of your labour.

What are Braxton Hicks contractions?

Braxton Hicks can occur all through the late stages of your pregnancy. They are the tightening of the muscle of the uterus which last for 30 – 60 seconds and may be several times an hour, several times a day.

How can I tell the difference between Braxton Hicks and real labour contractions?

Labour contractions are noticeably longer, more regular, increase in frequency and are generally more painful than Braxton Hicks contractions.

What are the 3 different stages of labour?

1. The first part of your labour is when the neck of the womb (cervix) opens to 10 centimetres. This begins with the latent phase and then moves into the active phase of labour
2. The second part of your labour is when the baby moves down through the vagina and is born.
3. The third part is when the afterbirth (placenta) is delivered.

What is the latent phase of labour? The latent phase is the beginning of the first part of your labour. It is a period of time that will not necessarily be continuous and is unique to each individual person. You may experience backache and cramps or have bouts of contractions that may last a few hours which then stop and start up again the next day. This is perfectly normal.

The duration of the latent phase of labour can be variable. It may last for 24hrs or more and can be exhausting for you. It helps if you can stay as relaxed as possible during this part of your labour and remain at home in comfortable surroundings as long as you can.

What is happening during the latent phase of labour?

You will have contractions and they will feel uncomfortable but may not be regular. They will be sharp but short lasting, this is normal. They will stop and start, last for

30 – 40 seconds and may continue for several hours. This is normal too, in the latent phase. The neck of the womb (the cervix) has been long and closed during your pregnancy. These first contractions, along with the Braxton-Hicks contractions that you may have already experienced, help to soften the neck of the womb and prepare your body for active labour.

As the contractions become closer together, longer and stronger, the neck of the womb will also begin to shorten and then open up. Once the cervix is 4cm dilated and the contractions are regular (every five minutes) and lasting for at least a minute, then labour has become active.

What should I do once the latent phase of labour begins?

If you think your labour is starting then you may want to seek advice from your midwife. You can ring the hospital at any time on

01905 733196

How can I help myself?

There are many ways of helping yourself to cope through these first hours of the latent phase of labour.

It is important to try and remain relaxed. Keep your breathing deep, steady and slow during a contraction. This will prevent you from using extra energy. Once the contraction is wearing off, close your eyes and allow your body to rest before the next one.

Take a warm bath or shower, at regular intervals. You will find the warmth of the water soothing and relaxing.

You may want to call your birthing partner for added support during this time. They will give you support and reassurance to help you feel calm and relaxed. It can be helpful if your partner massages your back to help with any backache and help you to relax and support you in any alternative positions that you may adopt.

It is important to remain active without exhausting yourself during this time. Take a walk with your partner, stopping if you need to during a contraction. Staying upright will assist gravity and help your baby to move down into the pelvis. Rocking your pelvis and swaying your hips or using a birthing ball can help too.

For further information about the latent phase please see the resources below.

[Latent Phase of Labour: Everything You Should Know | Tommy's](#)

[Signs that labour has begun - NHS](#)

Patient Experience

We know that being admitted to hospital can be a difficult and unsettling time for you and your loved ones. If you have any questions or concerns, please do speak with a member of staff on the ward or in the relevant department who will do their best to answer your questions and reassure you.

Feedback

Feedback is important and useful to us – it can tell us where we are working well and where improvements can be made. There are lots of ways you can share your experience with us including completing our Friends and Family Test – cards are available and can be posted on all wards, departments, and clinics at our hospitals. We value your comments and feedback and thank you for taking the time to share this with us.

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

If you have any concerns or questions about your care, we advise you to talk with the nurse in charge or the department manager in the first instance as they are best placed to answer any questions or resolve concerns quickly. If the relevant member of staff is unable to help resolve your concern, you can contact the PALS Team. We offer informal help, advice, or support about any aspect of hospital services & experiences.

Our PALS team will consult with the various departments in our hospitals on your behalf, if you feel unable to do so, to resolve your problems and where appropriate refer to outside help.

If you are still unhappy you can contact the Complaints Department, who can investigate your concerns. You can make a complaint orally, electronically or in writing and we can advise and guide you through the complaint's procedure.

How to contact PALS:

Telephone Patient Services: 0300 123 1732 or via email at: wah-tr.PET@nhs.net

Opening times:

The PALS telephone lines are open Monday to Thursday from 8.30am to 4.30pm and Friday: 8.30am to 4.00pm. Please be aware that a voicemail service is in use at busy times, but messages will be returned as quickly as possible.

If you are unable to understand this leaflet, please communicate with a member of staff.