

My top tips for labour ...

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1. Be aware of "optimal fetal positioning" - sleeping on your left side, spending time on all fours or with your knees lower than your hips to tip baby into the best position prior to labour, this usually makes for a shorter and easier labour.
2. Remember that labour is a marathon and hard work, but that giving birth is a NORMAL process and that YOU CAN DO IT! Prepare well for the marathon by practising yoga, swimming, walking - whatever activity appeals to you.
3. The marathon will require lots of energy, so eat well throughout your pregnancy; in early labour remember to eat and drink plenty of easily digested foods.
4. If at all possible have a midwife you know to care for you - ask your midwife if she will care for you at home or in hospital. If you are able to afford it consider employing an Independent Midwife who will offer you one to one care. All the outcomes are better with a known midwife!
5. Consider a home birth! Women are far more likely to give birth normally, less likely to need drugs, generally have shorter labours, are more likely to breastfeed and be happy with their experience.

Postnatally:

My top tip is that visitors should be restricted to the absolute minimum - you will feel fine whilst visitors are with you, but it is exhausting (even if you are just sitting chatting) - when they leave you will find yourself in tears and having to deal with a baby who probably didn't feed whilst visitors were around. Take time to establish feeding and "babymoon" with your baby and partner before welcoming visitors.

Other suggestions include:

- Massage is great for you and your partner. It helps relieve your pain, creates a diversion and makes you feel loved and supported. Your partner has a focus too, making them feel more involved.
- Consider using complementary therapies for pain relief.
- Relaxation is the secret to a good labour and using a Hypnobirthing CD or techniques learnt in a class work wonders for many women. It helps you

achieve deep relaxation as you get in tune with the primitive part of your brain, breathe effectively and believe your body can give birth.

- Once in hospital, don't be persuaded into rushing into induction or a hormone drip to speed up your contractions as it often leads to further intervention. Instead ask if it is safe to be given more time. Change your position or move around to ease labour aches or even have a rest or sleep to get your energy back up.
- If you can have something light to eat, and drink plenty of fluids, you will be working really hard in labour and your body needs fuel.
- Don't rush into hospital at the first twinges - labour is usually very long (much longer than you imagine), consider using a TENS machine, having a walk or a bath or sleep, even bake a cake! Do what feels right for you and stay in your own surroundings as long as possible - much nicer than spending hours in a hospital delivery room.
- Remember to urinate every few hours, you don't want a full bladder slowing the descent of the baby.
- Consider having a couple of birthing partners, labour is very long! Your partner will get tired. Having a woman who has successfully birthed before can be an amazing support for you both.
- Staying active, mobile and upright reduces the length of the labour. Good positions are leaning forward, sitting on the toilet, a birthing stool or ball or, if you are tired, make a "nest" of pillows on the bed so that you can lean forwards, relax or even sleep between contractions.
- Have a birth plan. Obviously labour is unpredictable; but if you can't guarantee continuity of care from one midwife I suggest that you write down what you'd like to happen in a Birth Plan.
- Use a birthing pool. Water is soooo relaxing and the buoyancy helps you to move around. I would encourage you to save the water until the going gets really tough, then you have another level to go to.
- To birth your placenta naturally, wait for your contractions to return then clench your fist, place it over your mouth and blow into it without letting any air out, just like blowing up a balloon. It relaxes your pelvic floor and helps push out the placenta.
- Sleep when your baby sleeps - don't use the time to put on a wash or catch up on chores.
- It is never too early to start doing pelvic floor exercises after the birth. As you get older you'll be glad you did!

