

## Preparing for Your Hospital or Birth Center Visit: A Complete Guide



### Highlights

Planning for your hospital or birth center visit includes preparing your bag and recognizing labor signs.

Labor often starts gradually, so knowing when to go is key.

Organizing transport in advance can make the process smoother.

A well-thought-out birth plan can help guide your decisions during labor.

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### Preparing for the Hospital or Birth Center

It can be hard to know when is the right time to go to the hospital or birth center when having a baby. If you're booked for an induction or caesarean birth, then the certainty around timing will be easier.

You should be prepared with what you need to take and how you will get to the hospital or birth center.

It's also a good idea to have a birth plan, so you have a written record of what you would like to happen when you are having your baby.

### **Items to Pack for the Hospital or Birth Center**

Make sure you have your bag packed with what you and your baby are going to need. You may want to take your own pillow. Pack toiletries and maternity sanitary pads.

Check with the hospital or birth center what they recommend to bring.

### **General**

Essential paperwork including identification, insurance details, birth plan, and hospital paperwork.

A small amount of cash if needed.

Avoid bringing valuables like jewelry or large sums of money.

### **For You**

Comfortable clothing for going home.

Maternity bras and sleepwear.

A warm jumper.

Toiletries.

Maternity sanitary pads.

Your own pillow if preferred.

### **For Your Baby**

Nappies (allow for 8 to 10 nappies per day).

Blanket and wraps.

Nappy wipes.

Clothing and going home outfit.

## **How to Get to the Hospital or Birth Center**

Plan for your trip and ideally, have a 'practice' run when you're in your third trimester. Be clear on where you can park. It's often useful for expectant parents and birth support partners to also have a tour of the maternity hospital or birth center to know what to expect.

Labor often starts unexpectedly, and it will help you feel organized if you have a plan for transport and know where you are going.

Discuss with your partner the route you will take and consider alternate routes depending on traffic and the time of day.

Plan not to drive yourself if in labor.

Keep your car topped up with fuel.

Have an alternative transport plan if needed.

Fit the baby car seat in advance and follow all manufacturer's recommendations for safe installation.

## **Early Labor Symptoms**

Early signs of labor can be subtle and start very slowly. As labor advances, these signs become clearer.

Common signs of early labor include:

Contractions starting mild and short, possibly stopping and starting over a few days.

Waters breaking (ruptured membranes).

A 'show'-a mucousy, blood-stained discharge indicating the cervix is dilating.

Backache or an upset stomach, including nausea and more frequent bowel

movements.

A feeling of pressure as the baby moves into the pelvis.

Cramping similar to period pain.

## **When to Head to the Hospital or Birth Center**

Be guided by your maternity care provider about the right time for you and your baby. Each pregnancy is unique, and support is essential.

It's a good idea to call the hospital to let them know you're on your way. Even if you feel you're managing well, informing them in advance helps with planning.

You should go to hospital or the birth center if you are:

Having contractions before 37 weeks of pregnancy.

Experiencing regular contractions (at least 3 contractions in 10 minutes for a first labor) that are growing stronger and requiring more focus.

Your waters break or you suspect they have broken.

Experiencing vaginal bleeding that is different from a mucousy 'show'.

Having a fever.

Noticing any changes in your baby's movement patterns.

Experiencing persistent pain that does not subside between contractions.

Seeking reassurance, advice, or pain relief.

Having a gut feeling that something is wrong.

Factor in travel time to the hospital, as sitting in a car for a long period may be uncomfortable. If you live far from the hospital, allow extra time for travel, especially during peak traffic hours.

If you're in early labor and have been checked at the hospital, you may be advised to go home until labor progresses further. This is common practice in the early stages of labor, which can often be long and tiring.

## **When to Contact Your Care Provider**

You can call for support and guidance anytime you feel concerned. Save the contact numbers in your phone and share them with your partner or birth support person. If you are in early labor and managing well, a call for reassurance and

guidance can be helpful.

## **Knowing When It's Time to Give Birth**

Labor has three stages, and each can vary from person to person. Expect an examination to check your stage of labor, but remember that your consent is required for any examination or procedure.

### **The First Stage**

Contractions increase in frequency and intensity.  
The cervix dilates and thins.  
This is usually the longest stage of labor.

### **The Second Stage**

Starts when the cervix is fully dilated (10 centimeters) and ends with the baby's birth.  
Often considered the most intense stage.

### **The Third Stage**

After the baby is born, the placenta is delivered.  
You may be asked to gently push to help detach and deliver the placenta.

## **Extra Tips for Your Hospital Visit**

Plan your older children's care in advance with backup options.  
Arrange care for pets during your hospital stay.  
Pack a small gift from the new baby to their older sibling to ease the transition into their new role.

## **Tools And Assistance**

### **Birth Plan Template**

A simple template to help you document your preferences for labor and delivery, including pain management options, preferences for support, and medical

interventions. Having a clear birth plan can help guide you and your healthcare team during labor.

### **Packing Checklist for the Hospital**

A detailed list to ensure you have everything you need when heading to the hospital or birth center. This includes personal items, baby necessities, and documents.

### **Hospital Tour Checklist**

A guide to help you prepare for your tour of the hospital or birth center. It includes essential questions to ask, such as hospital policies, room amenities, and what to expect during labor.

### **Labor Contraction Timer**

A tool or app to help you track the duration and frequency of contractions. This can help you determine when it's time to head to the hospital or birth center, or when to call your care provider.

### **Transport Planning Guide**

A resource to help you organize your transport to the hospital, including identifying backup routes and options for transport if driving is not possible. It also includes tips for preparing your car and ensuring the car seat is properly installed for baby.