



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 us and it is fabulous to see them “come into him/herself”. Sometimes we need to rub the baby’s back or feet to help. Every once in a while, a couple of breaths with the bag and mask and/or oxygen is needed.
- ◆ We are assessing everything from your baby’s position on your chest; there is no need to take him or her away from you. We can listen to his heart and lungs, check his color, and assess his well-being, 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.
- ◆ We’ll dry your baby off well, 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.
- ◆ Often you feel painful contractions again and a “heaviness” that are relieved by the passage of the placenta. We help it out but don’t 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 is often painful when I check your fundus—I’m sorry!
- ◆ I’ll use Pitocin, methergine or an herbal preparation if you are bleeding too much.
- ◆ I’ll show you the structure of your placenta and how it worked. It’s cool. I’ll also check it to make sure it is complete and normal.
- ◆ At some point, the cord will be clamped and cut. Usually this is done after the cord stops pulsating or after delivery of the placenta. The longer we wait, the better.

Fourth stage

- ◆ This is the stabilization of mom and baby. The immediate stabilization is for 2-3 hours after birth (we stay for this) and then we check you both at 24 hours.
- ◆ We’ll get you cleaned up, dry and comfortable. If the check of your perineum and vagina show tears, we’ll discuss suturing options and necessity. We’ll continue to check your fundus and bleeding for 2-3 hours.
- ◆ Nursing and bonding are the most important activities for the first minutes, hours and days of your baby’s life. Everything we do and recommend supports this. Adequate nursing is the best way to gauge baby’s health and provide necessary stimuli and nutrition.

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, has someone to look after the other children or pets, and has household chores taken care of. He needs to keep visitors to a minimum. He needs 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's 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.
- ◆ Did we mention 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. We are open to questions at any time and want to make this a happy and successful relationship for you.