

Tips for Partner or Support Person

Royal Hospital for Women

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Just as most women wonder how they will deal with labour, most partners or support people are apprehensive and wonder 'will I be able to help?' You don't have to have given birth or be a trained professional to support a woman in labour. Sharing the experience and being sensitive to her needs are far more important than knowing all there is to know about childbirth. The most important thing is to be there, physically and emotionally. If you also know what to expect and some specific ways to help you will feel more confident and knowledgeable.

- Massage, touch relaxation and breathing can be used to relieve tension. Everyone is individual, so find what soothes and relaxes your partner and practise them together regularly.
- In labour always let your partner know what is happening. Reinforce how well she is doing. Labour is a time when she will need encouragement and reassurance.
- Encourage and praise her, if she says she feels pain, acknowledge that what she is experiencing is hard. Then remind her of the progress she is making. With every contraction the cervix is dilating more. The baby is closer to being born.
- There are usually a few contractions that make a woman feel panicky and feel she is not in control or coping well. At these times keep her focused on the present. Remind her to take one contraction at a time and keep telling her that she is doing well.
- In established labour many women don't tell you what they need. She may lick dry lips, push damp hair from her face, rub her own back, etc. Use these cues to make her more comfortable.
- Maintain eye contact as much as possible - your non-verbal language can give her as much, if not more support, as the spoken word.
- Labour is an amazing emotional experience so there may be times when you will need support yourself. Remember your midwife has seen and helped many labouring women so she can offer an 'experienced' view and let you know how labour is progressing. This kind of reassurance helps take the guesswork out of it for you. Remember the staff are there to help you so don't hesitate to ask them questions.
- Have regular drinks and snacks. As labour progresses women are discouraged from eating large amounts of food - in fact they usually don't feel hungry - but partners and support people need nourishment.
- Familiarise yourself with the environment. When you do your hospital tour have a look around the room and take note of the facilities available.
- Wear loose, comfortable clothing and remember to bring a jumper and your swimming costume.
- A notebook and pen can be useful and keep a list of important telephone numbers with you at all times.

The two essentials of effective labour support are encouragement and close physical contact. There is no right or wrong way to support a labouring woman. You may have to ask her from time to time if what you are doing is helping or if she'd like you to do anything differently.