

A woman who
births well
has
highly developed
relaxation
skills.

WHAT IS ACTIVE LABOUR?

A few words ...

Well, whatever you have imagined would happen is about to happen. You now know that there's no going back, no stopping or doing this another day, no chance of handing over the effort to that man who got you pregnant.

A woman has a huge capacity to meet the challenge of a quick, progressive labour – one that has a clean start, builds, and is completed in a reasonable amount of time, with a manageable amount of effort. That's because her body and her baby are working effectively as a team and she just gets carried along, even if she experiences a lot of pain.

In this type of birth, a woman can either feel she managed well or didn't, but the labour and birth moved right along. People call this type of birth 'natural' even if there are medical assessments, monitoring or procedures, because it's obvious to everyone that the birth is just moving along without help.

However, there are also those niggling, annoying and irritating pre-labours that never seem to get going into ACTIVE Labour, and just drain your energy. This might happen to you. Below are some ideas for developing a plan.

This commonly happens before you go into **ACTIVE** labour

1. You get 'tightenings', which feel like contractions, for several days before you DO go into labour, and you confuse this with labour.
2. The tightenings are 15–20 minutes apart.
3. The tightenings can occur either at night, or during the day, or for a few hours at a regular time each day. You get excited and don't rest well.
4. The tightenings can feel painful, or are annoying.
5. They do not progress – your cervix does not dilate to 3cm or more, but you are certain you're in labour.
6. Your water bag may leak or break.

**These are the primary clues that you are
NOT in ACTIVE labour.**

Then what is it?

It's your uterus and baby preparing together for the active part of labour. It can be the uterus

- working to move the baby into a better 'birthing' position.
- thinning out the top of your vagina, thinning your cervix, and possibly beginning the dilation.

It's very easy to mistake these sensations for ACTIVE labour and to 'get into it' too soon, rushing around like a headless chicken, or sitting in a chair waiting for the next contraction that doesn't come for another 20 minutes. The result will be fatigue, discouragement and impatience. Constantly looking ahead, waiting for labour to pick up, can be frustrating if no changes actually occur. Stay in the NOW.

Some negative things you might do if you experience the above sensations

1. You think you're in labour and wait around for the next tightening, tiring yourself with the waiting.
2. You don't rest well because the tightenings are annoying or painful.
3. The tightenings keep you up at night and you and your partner get more and more tired.
4. You get excited and restless because the birth hormones, which are adrenalin-based, become more active.
5. You don't eat well or keep yourself hydrated.
6. You get stressed if 'nothing happens'.
7. By the time you go into ACTIVE labour, you are tired, irritable, and you may have lost your will and determination to do the hard work. You may think you've done enough. This situation can easily lead to wanting medical pain relief and eventually choosing an assisted delivery.

When women look back on this type of niggling labour, they often realise how blessed they were that their baby and their body gently eased them into ACTIVE labour. This response is more likely if a woman takes care of herself, making certain that she DOES NOT GO INTO LABOUR TIRED.

If you mistake these sensations for ACTIVE labour and they go on for several days, then you might look back on your labour as being 72 hours long.

In reality, the dilation phase will probably be only 10 hours or less. But if these sensations become the focus of your attention and you don't manage this unsettled period well, you will end up feeling that you've gone through a marathon labour.

If you don't manage this unsettled period well, you will feel that you've gone through a marathon labour.

You do the
best you can
with the skills
you have.
When you
know more,
you do
better.

(Maya Angelou)

When you know more, you do better:

“ This first-time mother had 3 days of niggles. The niggles kept her awake at night, so she knelt on her sofa, holding onto the back, and couldn't sleep. By the time labour really took off, she was absolutely exhausted. By the time she was fully dilated, she gave up and had a Caesarean.

When she got pregnant next, she changed her attitude and behaviour. She said that all the work she had done with *The Pink Kit* for her first birth had stayed in her head and not in her body. This next time, the information became hers and she had a lovely and very conscious second birth. ”

Positive things you can do about the niggles

Learn to recognise the signs and be truthful with yourself. ACTIVE labour is always progressive. There is always some noticeable change within an hour or two – the contractions get stronger, last longer, and are closer together. If there is not a noticeable change, you are not in ACTIVE labour. But don't get discouraged. You will eventually go into ACTIVE labour.

Although about 30% of women do not dilate until the very last few hours of ACTIVE labour, these labours will still have been progressing as described above.

Most women dilate by about 1 cm in 1 or 2 hours. These are progressive labours that start and end within 10 hours or less – the sort of labour that the medical profession would like all women to have.

Many other women dilate a bit, then reach a plateau and don't dilate for several hours; then dilate some more, plateau again, and so on. It all seems like a long slog. If you have a niggling start, you can use the following skills:

- ✓ Keep considering (and have your support person keep asking you): **'What do you want to do now?'** And then go about your life. You'll go into ACTIVE labour eventually.
- ✓ Rest, ResT, ReST, REST!
- ✓ Take walks, eat well, put the sensations out of your mind, use your Pink Kit skills.
- ✓ Take baths and showers and RELAX, RELAX, and RELAX some more.
- ✓ Appreciate that your body is gently doing what is necessary to help make your ACTIVE labour effective.
- ✓ Ask people to come over to keep you company, so you're not alone. Remind them to ask you the question **'What do you want to do now?'**
- ✓ Don't fall into the belief that if you niggle for 3 days and then go into labour, that you have been in labour for 3 days. You emotionally shoot yourself in the foot by thinking that way.

Really know when ACTIVE labour starts

When progressing ACTIVE labour kicks in, you will know it.

If it starts slowly and you still aren't certain, just follow the previous points.

Remember these signs of ACTIVE labour:

1. There is change every hour or so.
2. This means the sensations and contractions become more intense, stronger, and longer, closer together, or some combination of these.
3. Change keeps happening, at least every hour or two.
4. You just know.

It's important to use your Pink Kit skills to discipline yourself if labour does not really progress.

Relax, relax, relax

Practise this a number of times every day before the birth, while you're in the car, doing the dishes, at work, and so on. Or take five minutes and sit down.

1. Become quiet, breathe easily in and out through your nose.
2. Start by tensing up one area of your body – then relax it.
3. The first time you tense up, do it very strongly – then relax as deeply as you can.
4. The next time you tense up, do it as subtly as possible – then relax as deeply as you can.

Finally

Use all the skills you've learned in the resources of 'The Pink Kit Method for birthing better™' if you have this pre-labour experience, as well as when you know you are in labour. One or more of these skills will suit any moment of labour or birth.

The birth of your child is why you've put in the time to learn the Pink Kit skills. Now is the time to put them to use.

The slightest
tension
in labour
may cause
more pain
and slow the
labour down.