

# A child is born

## Getting ready for the big day

Many women feel nervous and a little scared before and on their final day of pregnancy. Giving birth is something the majority of women go through at some stage in their lives. It is important to prepare properly for that day. *Kosi Xaba* takes a look at what you can expect

### Worrying about the big day

Many pregnant women worry about what will happen to them or their baby when the time to give birth arrives. Worrying is normal because giving birth is a big event. Giving birth will be much easier if you feel confident and prepared.

In dealing with the worry, it is a good idea to talk to people about your worries and fears. Talking can help lessen the fears and help you learn and prepare for that day.

Childbirth is very painful. But the pain does go away. Try to remember that all the pain brings your baby closer to being born.

Learn to relax. Pain is not always easy to handle. The earlier in the pregnancy you learn to relax and breathe through the pain, the better you will cope with the pain. This way, more of your energy will go into

helping the baby to be born.

Read as much as you can. Knowing what to expect on the day of your baby's birth will help you prepare better. You will learn what the people who will help you deliver your baby will expect from you and what you could expect and demand from them.

Know about danger signs. If you start bleeding, having a bad smelling discharge or stop feeling your baby's movements for a long time, you must seek help immediately. After about 34 weeks, your baby should move about 10 times a day. You might also get severe headaches and not be able to see properly.

### Signs of labour

It is believed that hormones in the women's body help start labour. Messages are sent to the parts of the body telling them to prepare for labour.



Photo: Cedric Nunn

### The show

The mouth of the womb, called the cervix, is sealed with a mucous-like plug during pregnancy. The plug has been there all through your pregnancy to prevent infection going into your womb. This plug breaks around two weeks before the day of delivery. What you will see is a discharge mixed with some blood coming through your vagina. The blood is from the blood vessels that join this plug to the cervix. This is painless. However, not all women get the show.

### Waters breaking

Your baby has been living in a



**A baby being delivered by Caesarian section. Learning about what will happen during labour will prepare you for that day**

sac all this time. This sac is filled with a fluid called amniotic fluid.

As your baby's head pushes its way down to be born, it breaks the sac. It is impossible to hold back this fluid. It has no smell and looks clear or milky. For some women, their waters break as early as 12 to 24 hours before labour begins properly. With other women, it happens just before the head comes through.

## **Contractions**

Contractions are the movements of the walls of your uterus/womb in preparation for the birth of your baby. The feeling is different for every

women. Some contractions feel like strong menstrual pains, pulling in the lower abdomen or backache. Contractions come and go. They start off mild and get stronger with time. They also get closer and closer together. When they are still mild, you can move around, take walks and encourage the labour to progress. When there is more than one contraction in five minutes, your labour is more established. Learning the different ways of breathing during labour is very important. You can ask the doctor or sister at the clinic to tell you how to breathe.

If you choose to deliver

your baby at home, make preparations with qualified birth attendants or midwives. You must also have transport on standby should you need to be taken to the clinic or hospital.

## **What to expect at the clinic or hospital**

In South Africa there are still only very few clinics and hospitals which allow women to have their partners or friends with them through labour. If you want to have someone to support you during labour, make enquiries in good time.

Try to arrange this months before your baby is due.





**Most babies can start sucking immediately after the birth if they are not too tired**

Labour can be much easier if you have a loved one with you throughout to support you.

You have the right to know every little thing done to you. Ask for explanations. The midwife will see if your contractions are getting stronger. They will examine your vagina using their fingers to see if the cervix is opening up well. They will also use a fetoscope to listen to your baby's heartbeat to make sure your baby is okay.

When your cervix has opened widely enough (dilated by about 10cm) the baby's head will have gone right down and will be ready to be born. However, not all babies are born with their heads first. Most women get the feeling to bear down, the same feeling one has when wanting to pass a stool. This usually signals that your baby is ready to be born. The midwife will check to see

that you are ready.

You will be advised to push when you have a contraction. In between contractions you must try to relax. Pushing during a contraction means that you are helping your baby to be born. When the baby's head is born, the midwife will see if the cord is not around the baby's neck. You will need to rest again during this time. Once this is done and more contractions come, you will push the rest of the baby out. The baby will be put on your body so that you can see it and touch it straight away. Most babies can even start suckling immediately if they are not tired.

### **The placenta comes out**

Some minutes after the baby is born, the placenta or "after-birth", which feeds your baby

in your womb, will come out. If it does not come out naturally, the midwife or doctor may put their hand in to pull it out. This marks the end of labour and natural childbirth. Often the vagina tears as you baby comes through you. The doctor will stitch up the tear afterwards.

You must remember that something can go wrong with giving birth naturally and can result in you having to give birth by caesarian section. This means you will undergo an operation for your baby to be born.

Knowing what will happen during labour will help you prepare for that day. Get information at your local clinic. If there are classes at the clinic for pregnant women, try to attend them. If there is anything you do not understand, do not be shy to ask your doctor, nurse or a friend. ❄