

Just as every woman is unique, every labour and birth will be a unique experience, different for every woman, every time she births. Your body and your baby work together, driven by a cocktail of hormones which encourage your body to open, allowing your baby to be born. This journey is not only the birth of a baby, but also the birth of a mother, father and a new member to your wider family.

Late Pregnancy

Practice labour (Braxton hicks)

Often starts a few months before the birth of your baby and are similar in feeling to early labour. It's all part of the preparation, the uterus toning and practising the motions of labour. They are generally felt as waves, surges or tightening sensations and can sometimes become stronger closer to the birth of your baby. These stronger sensations around your due time can be part of the early softening of the cervix, preparing your body for labour and birth. For some women labour may begin with what feels like Braxton hicks, starting off being irregular and mild in intensity, growing more regular in both consistency and intensity, a good sign that your baby and your body are ready, labour has begun!

Lightening (engaging)

Is when the baby starts to move down the pelvis ready for birth. This can happen several weeks before your due time and can be accompanied by a release in strain on your lungs and under your rib cage, making breathing a little easier. This movement downwards can also increase the heaviness on your lower back and pelvis, perhaps changing the way you feel when you walk and sit.

Spurt of energy (nesting)

A feeling of wanting to get everything done, ready and sorted before your baby arrives! Some women feel the urge to clean and cook, some just have a little more energy than previous days, some women may not experience this at all.

Waters breaking:

The amniotic sac can separate at any stage, before the onset of labour, whilst in labour or even at the very end while your baby is being born. If your waters do separate you may notice that you have wet underwear, you may feel as though you have released a small amount from your bladder (wet your pants!) or it may come in more of a gush. If your underwear is wet or you think you may have lost your waters, then place a pad on and check again in half an hour to see if there is still wetness there. Amniotic fluid (waters) are generally

a clear fluid, if you notice any staining (colouration) to the fluid such as a greenish or brown tones, let your midwife know. If your waters do separate before labour starts, note down the time and colour of the waters. Perhaps a good topic to discuss with your midwife at some stage.

Show:

Your 'show' is a mucous plug that sits within your cervix, holding the tissue closed, keeping the uterus protected and secure. As you get closer to the birth of your baby, the tissue of the cervix starts to soften and change as the levels of the hormone prostaglandin rise. This softening allows the mucous plug to move away from the cervix, coming down through the body, often being seen by women, either finding the show in their underwear or seeing a mucous discharge which can sometimes have some blood staining to it, hence it is sometimes called the bloody show. The mucous plug could leave the body many days before labour starts, within early labour and some women may not see or experience their show at all.

Emotions:

This is a time often filled with an array of emotions. Women are looking forward to meeting their baby, to finally be able to see them and hold them, there's an excitement in the air, waiting, longing, for the arrival of your baby! For some women there are mixed feelings, changes in lifestyle, becoming a parent, the feelings of lack of experience, not knowing what life will be like, these can all come forward for some in the last few weeks of pregnancy. There is a sense of needing to slow down a little (or a lot!) and perhaps some changes in activities you used to do. Feeling tired and uncomfortable can be some challenges for some women in the last few weeks of pregnancy. These can all be very normal feelings as you move into a new experience in your life. It is important to talk with your midwife about how you are feeling, let her know if you have any areas of concern or worry. Of course that is what we at Maternal Journey are here for also. Feel free to come and chat with us anytime.