

How Dads Can Support Moms During Labor

Before labor begins

- ◆ Assist in installing the car seat
- ◆ Attend childbirth classes or read reputable sources to learn about the stages of labor and what to expect during childbirth
- ◆ Discuss mom's birth preferences (often referred to as a "birth plan")
- ◆ Pack a bag to take with you to the hospital (it should contain a change of clothes, comfortable shoes, a toothbrush/toothpaste, any necessary medications, a cell phone/charger, a camera, and a filling snack)
- ◆ Help mom time her contractions when she begins having them regularly

During labor

- ◆ Carefully drive mom to the hospital
- ◆ Tell mom that she is doing great
- ◆ Help adjust the environment in the hospital room so it is comfortable for mom (dim the lights, begin diffusing essential oils, turn on some music, etc.)
- ◆ If mom has not had an epidural, then assist her in walking, standing, kneeling, or sitting on an exercise ball during contractions
- ◆ If mom has not had an epidural, then assist her in using hydrotherapy (soaking in a warm bath, spraying painful areas such as the low back or abdomen with warm water while in the shower, etc.)
- ◆ If mom has not had an epidural, then assist her to the bathroom to urinate at least once an hour
- ◆ If mom has had an epidural, then help her to change positions in the bed frequently
- ◆ If mom has back labor, then offer to apply counter pressure (steady, strong pressure applied to the low back or on the side of each hip) during contractions
- ◆ Apply a heating pad or warm blanket to mom's lower back, limbs, or perineum (when delivery nears)
- ◆ Offer to rub mom's feet, shoulders, hands, etc.
- ◆ If mom doesn't want to be touched, then provide verbal support and continue to stand near so she can feel your presence
- ◆ Offer to provide entertainment and distractions (play card games, find a TV show to watch, etc.)
- ◆ Offer mom ice chips, sips of water, and snacks
- ◆ Breathe with mom or look her in the eye and encourage her to breathe with you
- ◆ Place a cool washcloth on mom's forehead or neck
- ◆ Ask questions if the healthcare team doesn't explain what they are doing or why they are doing it
- ◆ Step in and be assertive with healthcare providers if they do not appear to be listening to mom

Please note that every couple is different and every labor is different. Therefore, couples should have ongoing communication regarding which strategies are beneficial and which aren't. Likewise, couples should discuss the suitability of some strategies (laboring in a bathtub, consuming snacks, etc.) with their healthcare teams.

Sources:

Shannon Coleman, *BellyBelly* (<https://www.bellybelly.com.au/men/supporting-her-in-labour/>), *BabyCenter* (https://www.babycenter.com/0_ten-tips-for-labor-coaches_1072.bc), and *Parents.com* (<https://www.parents.com/pregnancy/giving-birth/labor-support/labor-delivery-advice-dads/>).

During a vaginal delivery

- ◆ Help mom find the most comfortable and productive position for pushing
- ◆ Whisper quiet words of encouragement
- ◆ Give mom your hand to squeeze
- ◆ If mom holds her breath while pushing, then remind her to breathe every 6-10 seconds
- ◆ Assist mom in maintaining her preferred position for delivery (hold her legs, support her back, etc.)
- ◆ Assure mom that baby is almost here once you see the head
- ◆ Assist mom in having skin-to-skin contact with the baby and in initiating breastfeeding (if she plans to breastfeed)
- ◆ Ask questions if the healthcare team doesn't explain what they are doing or why they are doing it
- ◆ Step in and be assertive with healthcare providers if they do not appear to be listening to mom

During a C-section delivery

- ◆ Stay near mom so she can feel your presence
- ◆ Speak words of assurance and encouragement
- ◆ Hold mom's hand
- ◆ Provide mom with information regarding the progress of the surgery and what is happening with baby (baby is being dried off, weighed, swaddled, etc.)
- ◆ If your healthcare team allows it, then assist mom in holding baby and having skin-to-skin contact while still on the operating table
- ◆ If your healthcare team does not allow mom to hold baby while still on the operating table, then hold baby and consider providing skin-to-skin contact until mom is able to do so
- ◆ If your hospital routinely separates moms and babies after cesarean deliveries, then remain with baby to begin bonding and assist with the first bath
- ◆ If your hospital does not routinely separate moms and babies after cesarean deliveries, then remain with mom and baby to offer emotional and practical support (assist mom in positioning baby to breastfeed, request additional blankets if mom feels cold, change baby's diapers, etc.)
- ◆ Ask questions if the healthcare team doesn't explain what they are doing or why they are doing it
- ◆ Step in and be assertive with healthcare providers if they do not appear to be listening to mom

After delivery

- ◆ Be prepared to cut the umbilical cord
- ◆ Take lots of photos
- ◆ Begin informing close family members and friends of baby's arrival
- ◆ Change baby's diapers
- ◆ Keep visitors at bay until mom is ready for them and then make sure they don't overstay their welcome
- ◆ Verify that the information on the form for the birth certificate is correct
- ◆ Carefully drive mom and baby home from the hospital