



Delivery and After Birth

What to Expect

You've made it through the first stage: labor. Are you ready for the second and third? Here's what to expect during delivery and afterward.

Birth

You labor for possibly many hours while your cervix dilates to 10 centimeters. Once you're fully dilated, you enter the second stage of childbirth: delivery.

You'll feel an involuntary urge to push. This is when a labor nurse or your coach is most valuable. This stage can last anywhere from a few minutes to three hours. Contractions are coming every two to five minutes and lasting 60 to 90 seconds. Your doctor, midwife or nurse will coach you through, telling you when to push and when to hold back.

You may be given an episiotomy, a surgical cut to enlarge the birth opening, just before the baby is born. The pushing and delivery is a heady experience. You'll probably feel a variety of incredible and intense feelings. You may feel shaky or nauseous. You may feel euphoric that the end is so near. Even if you've had an epidural and need more direct coaching for the pushing, you will not be deprived of the emotional experience.

Tips for Pushing

- Push intensely and evenly, making each push count.
- Remember to push from the diaphragm downward and concentrate on relaxing the vaginal canal.
- Try not to push so hard that you're out of breath.
- At the end of each push, try to hold your muscles to keep the baby from sliding back up.
- Pushing from a squatting position or an upright or side-lying position may be easier for you.

You may experience a burning or stretching sensation as your perineum is widened. Depending on what types of medication, if any, you use, you may be able to feel the baby in the birth canal during contractions.

The Third Stage

Chances are, once your baby is pushed completely out and delivered into your arms, you will feel true euphoria. This natural high will last for several hours, perhaps even days. But you still have the third stage of labor to go through: delivery of the placenta.

After your baby is born, contractions will begin again, although they'll be much less intense. The contractions allow you to push out the placenta and surrounding membranes. The placenta will be examined carefully to make sure none of it has stayed inside the uterus.

Delivering the placenta can take anywhere from five to 30 minutes. It can be done naturally or with a drug to induce the contractions to deliver it. Your focus may be so much on your baby, that you'll hardly notice anything else.

