

Stages of Labor

Your health care provider may describe the progress of your labor in terms of your baby’s **“position and station,”** as well as by the **effacement and dilation** of your cervix. These terms can help you to understand what occurs during the three stages of labor.

Your Baby Moves into Position

Position is your baby’s placement in the uterus (facing left or right, head first, or feet first). **Station** refers to how far your baby has moved down (descended) into the pelvic cavity.

First Stage of Labor

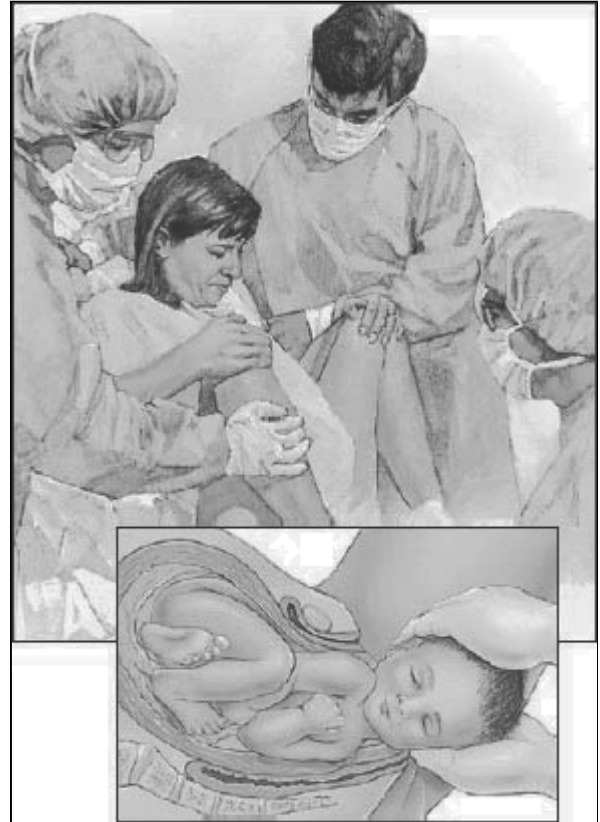
During the first stage of labor, uterine contractions help your cervix thin (**efface**) and widen (**dilate**) to help your baby pass through the birth canal (**vagina**). At first your contractions are further apart, but gradually increase in frequency and duration until they are about 2–5 minutes apart and last about 45–60 seconds.

Second Stage of Labor

In the second stage of labor, your baby is moved down the birth canal by even stronger uterine contractions. They may happen every 2–3 minutes and last from 60–90 seconds. Your doctor will ask you to “bear down” or push with each contraction. Your contractions are stronger now, so try to rest as much as possible during intervals.

Third Stage of Labor

The third stage of labor refers to the delivery of the afterbirth or placenta, which is shed from the uterus after your baby is born. Your uterus will continue to contract, but your contractions are milder and far less uncomfortable.



During the second stage of labor, your baby passes through the birth canal.