

## 2. Walk, Move Around, and Change Positions Throughout Labor

**A**sk women who have given birth naturally what helped them ease the pain of labor, and many will say it was the ability to move around and change positions.

### Why movement and position changes make labor easier

- When you walk or move around in labor, your uterus works more efficiently
- Changing position moves the bones of the pelvis to help the baby find the best fit through your birth canal
- Upright positions use gravity to help bring the baby down
- Upright, side-lying, and forward-leaning positions allow plenty of blood flow to your baby, so he may be less likely to show signs of distress
- Actively responding to labor may help you feel more confident and less afraid

### Movements for Labor

There is no one way or right way to move in labor, and no position will feel comfortable for all women. The most important thing is to have the freedom to follow the guidance of your own body. Often, the positions that bring you the most comfort will also help your labor progress.

Many women like to walk and be upright in the earlier part of labor, but in transition (the part of labor just before pushing), they prefer hands-and-knees or side-lying positions. Those two positions continue to be useful in the second stage (pushing phase) of labor, along with upright positions like sitting and squatting (see pages 13-14).

One position that is rarely comfortable and may be unsafe for your baby is lying flat on your back. In this position, the blood vessels that bring oxygen to your baby can be compressed, and your baby may show signs of distress.



*Walking during early labor helps keep labor moving.*

## RESEARCH insights

Research confirms that confining laboring women to bed increases pain and decreases women's satisfaction with their birth experience.

Some studies have shown that women who walk or remain upright have shorter labors and more vaginal births, while other studies have found no difference. But no study has shown that walking or upright positions slow labor down, increase the likelihood of cesarean surgery, or are associated with any harm to the mother or baby.

### Finding Freedom

While we know there are many benefits to being free to move around during labor, a survey of women who gave birth in U.S. hospitals in 2005 found that only one in four women walked around in labor. What is keeping so many laboring women in bed? Most women said they couldn't walk because they were "connected to things"—continuous electronic fetal monitors, intravenous lines (IVs), or both. Be careful about agreeing to these interventions (see pages 10-11), and if they are necessary, ask for mobile devices so you can still move around.



*Forward-leaning positions can help your baby rotate to an optimal position for birth.*



*Soaking in a tub can be very soothing when labor gets hard.*

## Here are some things that will help you move in different ways during your labor:

- Plenty of space to walk around in
- A deep tub to soak in
- A shower
- A birth ball (exercise physio-ball)
- A variety of comfortable furniture, such as a rocking chair and couch
- A squatting bar and/or birthing stool
- Telemetry (portable monitoring equipment that allows women to walk around even if they need continuous fetal monitoring)
- CD players for music, which can encourage movement
- An active support person to help you move and change positions

## take NOTE

### An Alternative to Routine IV Use

Some hospitals require that an IV be started when you are admitted. If this is the case at your birth setting, ask for a saline lock. This often satisfies the hospital requirement without limiting your mobility.

## PARTNER tip

### Helping With Movement

During active labor, some women have a hard time deciding how they want to move. Images from television and movies may leave them thinking they are expected to stay in bed.

Labor partners can encourage women to use movement and position changes to improve their comfort and help labor progress. You might help your laboring partner by taking a walk or slow-dancing with her, by making sure she has access to props such as a birth ball and squatting bar, and by suggesting different positions, especially when she seems discouraged or uncomfortable.



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