

Surfing Through Labor

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There are many different ways people get into the water. Some may take a long time, stepping into the water just a little bit at a time, some stand perfectly still for a long time before plunging in, some just plunge in right away while others never do more than get their feet wet. There are as many ways to labor as there are ways to get wet. Active labor will often “kick in” when a woman decides to accept labor, rather than try to avoid it. It is like the decision to plunge into the water – you might say, “after the next wave” several times before it feels like the right moment, but you will eventually be ready to do it.

Getting through labor is a lot like surfing. Between the waves, the surfers are waiting and watching, focused on the wave that's coming. As each wave approaches, they mentally and physically prepare to ride the wave. If they get distracted and are not paying attention, the next wave will crash over them, pushing them under the water, and all they can do is try to survive that wave.

When a woman in labor becomes distracted, the contraction can be like the wave, crashing over them and causing intense pain. This is the point at which many women feel they can't handle the pain any longer, and ask for an epidural -- but it's just a temporary setback.

Contractions also come in waves and if you're prepared for the waves, they won't overcome you. If you lose control of a wave, don't worry -- you can get through it as best you can and you'll be even more prepared for the next one. Stay focused and relaxed, and you can be in control and ride the waves, one wave at a time.

During labor you will know the next contraction is starting before the monitor can register the contraction (if you are being monitored) and, hopefully, you will be off the monitor more than you are on it. Your birth support team can help you ride the waves, but we need to know the contraction is coming as soon as you know it. Most women will find a way to signal the onset of a contraction to their team, but since you should be taking a welcoming breath at the beginning of each contraction anyway, that is the perfect signal.



As your labor progresses, you will become more inner focused. You won't want to take the time or breath to verbally let your team know when your contraction is beginning. So, at the beginning of each contraction, take a deep welcoming breath, in through your nose and out through your mouth, to notify your team and oxygenate your baby. When the contraction ends, take another deep cleansing breath to signal its passing and to start your relaxation time.

Your doula is like the life guard, quietly observing, making suggestions only when necessary. She will watch over you, helping to keep you safe, but she knows that you are strong and capable. She is trained to recognize trouble spots and is ready to help you if you need help, or just to watch and support you as you access your inner strength.

If you can stay relaxed and focused, your team can help you get through your labor with the least amount of pain and intervention.