

# Labor Pain and for How Long?

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As the days of pregnancy whiz by, the thought of pain looms closer and closer. You may be asking yourself, "Just how much pain will there be? And, how long will it last? Will I survive?"

There are different ways to look at pain. Since electronic fetal monitoring produces a print-out of contractions that appear as little mountains, I like to say that the most challenging part of contractions is when the pain is "on its way up." For example, climbing a mountain that gets steeper and steeper. But, since climbing down a steep mountain can be equally as brutal as going up (using different muscle groups but they also get equally as fatigued and painful), there is another less politically-correct way that I sometimes use to illustrate the pain of contractions. Using both of their hands, one person places a firm grip on another person's forearm. Then, they start squeezing and turning each of their hands in opposite directions. This used to be called an "Indian Burn." As they continue to twist your skin around, it gets more and more painful. Once they reach the maximum that you can take, they start to loosen their grip slowly. As the loosening of their twisting grip begins, you have some degree of instant relief, although it continues to feel better and better as their grip loosens. It's similar with contractions.

As the contraction starts to grab your attention and indeed your physical body, it's not too bad at first, but you know it's going to get worse and quickly. In a matter of seconds, it demands your full attention. Then, it demands every fiber of your being. PAIN! But, almost just as quickly, it starts to loosen. The loosening continuously gets easier and easier until it finally lets go completely.

So, let's go with the assumption that the hard parts (no pun intended!) of the contractions are when it is "going up the hill" because you know it's going to continue to get worse for a few seconds. Or perhaps you'd like to consider the "over the top of the hill" as the hardest (both the last part of the "going up" and the first part of the "going down"). Because, in reality, the very first part of the contraction isn't all that bad. Part of the pain is caused by the anticipation of the height of the intensity. And, in reality, the initial loosening of the contraction doesn't feel all that much better. In any case, it's about half of the contraction (either the going up part or the over the top part). Taking all of this into consideration, let's look at the timing of the really hard parts:

<b>STAGE</b>	<b>MINUTES APART</b>	<b>LASTING</b>	<b>NUMBER IN 1 HOUR</b>	<b>TIME OF PAIN/HOUR</b>
Early Labor	5	60 seconds	12	6 minutes
Active Labor	3	60 seconds	20	10 minutes
Transition	2	90 seconds	30	22 minutes
Pushing	5	60 seconds	12	6 minutes

Now the real question is: Can you survive that? Keep in mind that contractions don't cause harm like being on fire does. In addressing some patient questions about whether to use an epidural or not, some practitioners have replied, "If you were on fire, wouldn't you want me to pour a bucket of water on you?" But, contractions don't cause harm. They are a normal part of labor. They are the power and the strength that move the baby from the inner womb to the outer womb. God created your body to do exactly what it will be doing in labor. The baby emerges from a natural "opening" in the body. It's not like having gallbladder surgery in which healthy skin is sliced open (yes, for a greater good, but still!).