



The Whys and Hows of Pain

What Causes Pain during Labor?

As you listen to Birth Stories, you'll hear a lot about the following:

- The occurrence of pain: *"I had very little pain during the dilation, but my crotch was so tight I kept pulling back from the burning"* or *"The pain in 1st Stage was pretty bad, but once I dilated, my baby just slid out."*
- The quantity of pain: *"It was manageable"* or *"It was horrible."*
- The place of pain: *"I felt my contractions in my belly"* or *"It was the back labor that drove me wild."*

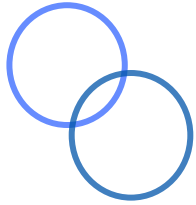
When the cause of the pain is unknown, we tend to become more concerned, anxious, and afraid. Most people do not understand what the pain of childbirth is caused by; therefore, concern arises that the "pain" is a potentially serious "problem."

If we know our pain is caused by a sore throat, and the sore throat is not life-threatening, we cope better. If we have an accident and break a leg, we know exactly why our bone is hurting, and we cope better. So the first thing you need to learn is the origin of labor pain. Then you need to know if labor pain ever indicates a medical problem.

Mother and child

In its simplest form, childbirth is an exercise in plumbing. A big object must come down, through, and out of a container (the woman's body). The baby moves down through the skeleton of the woman's body. But there is more to a woman's body than bones. There's all our soft tissue, and it's this soft tissue that is much more involved in the pain.

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In order for your baby to move through and out of its container, three things must occur:

- The cervix must open: dilation.
- The baby must fully come through the hole in the skeleton: descent.
- The baby must then open the soft tissue of the vagina or birth canal: birth.

Once you understand where your baby is in its journey through and out of the container, you'll understand why pain increases, decreases, or doesn't exist at all. Luckily, within each Stage of labor, there are a limited number of causes of the annoying, hard-to-cope-with pain.