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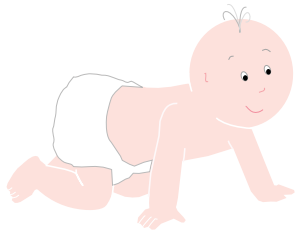
The Top Ten Labor-Related Worries

by Ann Douglas

Hit with a bad case of stage fright now that your baby's due date is fast approaching? You're certainly in good company. It's a rare mother-to-be, after all, who doesn't experience at least one sleepless night wondering if she's got what it takes to deal with the challenges of labor.

And, for whatever reason, those labor-related worries *do* like to rear their ugly heads in the wee hours of the morning, right when your baby is busy using your bladder as a trampoline! Here's what you need to know about each of the top ten labor-related worries.

1. **I'm worried that I won't figure out that I'm really in labor until I'm about to give birth.** We've all read stories about women giving birth in grocery stores because they didn't realize that it was "the real thing" until it was too late. Fortunately, these types of deliveries are relatively rare – which goes a long way toward explaining why they tend to make front-page news when they happen! While you might have your doubts initially about whether you're dealing with true labor or a particularly nasty imitation, as your labor progresses, you'll have a better idea about what is (or isn't) going on. And even if you're still stumped at that point, your doctor or midwife will be able to step in and help you to make the definitive call. (It's part of their job description!)
2. **I'm concerned that I'll show up at the hospital only to find out that I'm not really in labor.** It can happen to the best of us. (Heck, it even happened to my prenatal instructor!) While it may be a bit embarrassing and frustrating to race to the labor and delivery ward only to find out that you're still as pregnant as ever, no one will think any less of you for wanting to check things out. After all, it's a far wiser woman who heads off to labor and delivery prematurely than she who gives birth at the side of the highway!
3. **I'm worried that my water will break while I'm dining out at a fancy restaurant.** Here's a statistic that may help to reassure you: only 10% of women experience the rupture of their membranes prior to the onset of labor. So unless you're planning to head for the restaurant *after* the contractions start coming fast and furious, odds are you'll be fine. And even if your water did happen to break in the middle of the restaurant, it wouldn't be the end of the world. Your baby's head would act like a cork, blocking the exit to your uterus and slowing the flow of amniotic fluid to a mere dribble. So while you'd be acutely aware that something unusual was happening (imagine a slight popping sensation followed by a slow leak!), no one else in the restaurant would necessarily be any the wiser.



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4. **I'm worried that I'll go into labor in my sleep and only wake up when the baby's head is beginning to crown.** This isn't a worry: this is wishful thinking on your part! Seriously, your chances of sleeping through the heavy-duty labor contractions are pretty much on par with your odds of sleeping through an earthquake, a flash-flood, or some other natural disaster. It ain't going to happen, sister.
5. **I'm petrified that I won't be able to cope with the pain of labor.** Given the number of scary stories you've no doubt been exposed to over the past nine months, it's hardly surprising that you're being hit with a bad case of stage fright. The best way to combat this particular fear is to arm yourself with the facts. Read as much as you can about giving birth. Sign up for childbirth classes. And talk to your doctor or midwife about your various pain relief options. If you're still feeling pretty freaked out, remind yourself that generations of women have walked this road before and lived to tell. You will, too.
6. **I'm worried that I'll lose control during labor.** Fortunately, labor has not yet become a spectator sport, so you don't have to be unduly concerned about your "performance." Your doctor or midwife has seen it all and certainly won't think any less of you if you happen to grunt, swear, or otherwise "lose it" during the heat of labor. It's all part of the baby-catching turf.
7. **I'm worried that my partner won't find me attractive once he's seen me give birth to our child.** While you might think that witnessing a birth could prove to be the most effective method of birth control known to man, most men find that their libido escapes relatively unscathed. Sure, there can be a period of adjustment at first, but chances are he'll be fascinated rather than turned off by your post-baby body. And it's not as if you're going to be eager to hop in the sack within 24 hours of the delivery either. Trust me: you'll have other things on your mind.
8. **I'm worried that there won't be anyone around to watch my older child once I go into labor.** The best way to cope with this particular fear is to keep a list of potential babysitters close to the phone. That way, when the moment of truth arrives, you can start hitting speed dial. If you're really concerned, lend your cell phone to your prime babysitting candidate and ask her to carry it with her 24 hours a day. That should give you one less thing to worry about.
9. **One of my pregnancy books talks about awful things like perineal shaves and enemas. Do hospitals still do that sort of stuff?** Chances are the pregnancy book that you're reading is well on its way to becoming an antique. Thankfully, perineal shaves and enemas have pretty much gone the way of the do-do bird. Just count your lucky stars that you're giving birth today – not 20 years ago.
10. **I'm worried that labor is the easy part: that the really tough stuff will start after the birth.** While motherhood is a major challenge (particularly if this is your first time up to bat!), generations of women before you have managed to survive that boot camp-like experience known as postpartum. Some even went on to have subsequent children! So try not to worry about life after baby: there will be plenty of time to think about that down the road. And after this crash course in late-pregnancy worrying, you'll be in fine form for all the worrying that motherhood entails.