

Penny Sunkin's Road Map of Labor



How to Use *Penny Simkin's Road Map of Labor*

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In many ways, labor is a journey into the unknown. As with any new journey, having a map to guide you is helpful. The journey has three elements:

- 1) The winding yellow brick road, with twists and turns and no fixed timeline, which eventually ends joyfully with the birth of the baby.
- 2) The detour for back pain—a longer, rougher road that eventually rejoins the yellow brick road.
- 3) The turnoff from the yellow brick road, which represents a choice to have an epidural for pain relief.

Use this road map to guide you on your labor journey. Its landmarks and signposts will tell you where you are. The road map will also remind you of positions, comfort measures, and activities to use to ease the journey. Refer to it whenever you are wondering what you might try to ease pain or discomfort or to improve labor progress.

In the upper left corner, you see the couple in early labor as they begin their one-way journey. Put yourself in the couple's place. The signs and pictures are reminders of how to care for yourself. They also suggest good distractions to use during early labor. Distractions can help keep your mind from racing ahead of your cervix and thinking you are further along in labor than you actually are.

As labor progresses, you travel past the "3cm" sign and shift to activities that help you find your own best way to cope with the discomfort and uncertainties of labor. If you wonder where you are in labor, show the road map to your caregiver or doula. She or he can guide you.

If you have back pain, you will have to take the detour and use different comfort and labor promoting measures to deal with the unique challenges of back labor.

At some point, you may consider using pain medication, which is represented on the map by the epidural highway. The epidural may be given at almost any time during labor. As you can see, the road changes dramatically with an epidural. Once you receive an epidural, you become much more comfortable, but your nurse, midwife, or doctor will now take over all responsibility for keeping you and the baby safe, managing your labor progress, and delivering your baby. More precautions, medications, and procedures are necessary when you have an epidural. You will recognize that labor has become more of a medical procedure. Your own role becomes passive as you await the end of your journey.

When you reach the "10cm" sign, it will soon be time to begin pushing, and your destination—the birth of your baby—is not too far away. The pictures show different positions for you to use for pushing both with and without an epidural.

The final picture, which shows the couple holding their baby in their arms, only hints at the amazing rewards that await you at the end of your long, hard journey. Congratulations!



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