



Understanding Labor

Labor is divided into three stages:

Stage one begins with the onset of contractions and generally lasts 1-2 hours. During this phase, contractions move the foal through the cervix and into position in the birth canal. The fetal membranes (allantois) may become visible at the mare's vulva. When the sac breaks, signaled by a rush of fluid, stage one ends.

Stage two is the actual expulsion of the foal. If it takes more than 30 minutes for the mare to deliver, there could be a problem. Call your veterinarian immediately. If labor seems to be progressing, wait and watch. Even in a normal delivery, the mare may stand up, lie down, and roll several times in an effort to properly position the foal for delivery.

Normal presentation resembles a diving position, with front feet first, one slightly ahead of the other, hooves down, followed closely by the nose, head, neck, shoulders, and hindquarters. If you notice hoof soles up, the foal may be backwards or upside down. If this happens, or you suspect any deviation from the normal delivery position, call your equine practitioner.

Stage three labor begins after delivery, when the afterbirth (placenta) is expelled. Most placentas are passed within 1-3 hours after the foal is delivered. If the placenta has not passed within 3 hours, call your veterinarian. A retained placenta can cause serious problems, including massive infection and laminitis.

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Your eleven-month waiting game will be over before you know it. To prepare, brush up on your foaling knowledge by visiting the AAEP website, myhorsematters.com. Contact your veterinarian with any further questions you may have about caring for your expectant mare.

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