



The Physiological third stage of labour

Your placenta is the magical lunchbox of your baby and the multi tasking miracle that has grown and nourished your baby in utero. The only organ in our female body that requires expulsion.

When your baby is born, oxytocin peaks, triggered by you and your baby touching gazing, loving, smelling and bonding. This physiological love causes contractions to continue to detach and expel your placenta.

When birthing your baby, at the pushing phase, you produce adrenaline. So when you have birthed, its normal to shake and feel very cold because of this particular hormone. To birth your placenta, you need to bring back the oxytocin hormone, the one of calm, love and connection. Its therefore important to keep super warm and snuggled with your new born, taking deep breaths to calm and relax and even attempting to put your baby to the breast to latch.

If labour has been medicalised, these last crucial surges of oxytocin can be easily inhabited.

“The bottom line is that the birth of the placenta and the prevention of excessive bleeding (haemostasis) relies on the effective uterine contraction” says midwife & author Rachel Reed www.midwifethinking.com

Ineffective uterine contraction is the main cause of postpartum haemorrhage. If you are bleeding at all or any other complications you will need to have a managed 3rd stage.

Hospitals are keen to offer active management of the 3rd stage, especially if one hour has passed with no placenta release. They will discuss this with you. You have every right to wait.

NHS guidelines recommend the use of synthetic oxytocin to speed up the birth of the placenta if it takes longer than 30-60minutes. However, if there is no evidence of heavy bleeding or haemorrhage, you have every right to wait. If you have had drugs or an induction, or you are bleeding heavily, an actively managed 3rd stage with an injection may be be advisable.

What is a managed 3rd stage or active management of 3rd stage ?

This means an injection to the thigh of Syntometrine drug - Syntocinon (synthetic oxytocin) & Ergometrine (to control bleeding) stimulate the contraction to detach and release the placenta.

Bear in mind that active management by syntometrine has benefits of the quick release of your placenta, however it triggers a rapid shut down of blood vessels so can make you feel sick and dizzy and detached for a period.

A managed 3rd stage will also cause an uprush of activity as after some minutes, the injection causes the cervix to close, making the placenta's arrival a matter of urgency.

Delayed cord clamping

Premature cord clamping results in reduced blood volume to baby and is associated with poorer short term and long term outcomes – Kresch 2017.

Short term (in first 24 hours) – lower blood volume, lower blood pressure, decreased renal flow, decreased urine output ie ; major organs are not optimally functioning.

Long term – lower serum ferritin levels and higher rates of iron deficiency anaemia at 6 months of age and reduced fine motor function and social development at 4 years of age.

Your baby receives one third more blood volume if delayed cord clamping occurs. Baby will also receive stem cells which evidently play an important role in repairing any damage caused during birth.

After birth the placental blood volume is transferred through the pulsing cord into the baby, increasing baby's circulating blood volume.

Two major effects are :

1. Provides the extra blood volume needed for the heart to direct 50% of its output to the lungs. This extra blood fills the capillaries in the lungs making them expand to provide support for the alveoli to open. It also aids lung fluid clearance from the alveoli. These changes allow the baby to breathe effectively. Rachel reed – www.midwifethinking.com
2. Increases the number of circulating red blood cells which carry oxygen. This increases the baby's capacity to send oxygen around the body.

Midwife Nadia says " Wait for white! do not touch the cord until you are clear the blood has stopped passing through and is completely white. The longer the better, there is no rush".

References :

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