

MATERNAL NEWBORN NURSING.

Chapter 8: Process and Stages of Labor and Birth.

The Physiology of Labor.

- Labor:
 - Begins between 38 weeks and 42 weeks gestation.
- Theories explaining the onset of labor:
 - Increased levels of oxytocin stimulate the uterine muscle causing myometrial (uterine muscle) activity.
 - Oxytocin stimulates prostaglandins to cause cervical softening and increase uterine muscle sensitivity.
 - Progesterone levels decline allowing estrogen to stimulate contractions.
 - Rising level of estriol produces an imbalance with estradiol triggering labor.
 - Uterus becomes over-stretched leading to a natural expulsion of the contents.
- Uterine muscle layers:
 - External.
 - Internal.
 - Middle.
- Musculature changes in the pelvic floor:
 - Levator ani and fascia pull the vagina and rectum upward and forward with each contraction.
 - Pressure of the fetal head causes these muscles to thin from 5 cm to 1 cm at the time of birth.
- Signs of labor:
 - Bloody show.
 - Burst of energy.
 - Rupture of membranes (ROM).
 - Lightening.
 - Contractions.
 - Cervical changes.
 - Effacement.