

Second Wind for Second Stage Explained (From email correspondence)

At the end of the first stage of labor, cervical dilation is pretty much complete. Contractions have been coming long and strong and very close together--one on top of the other and lasting over a minute. The uterus has been contracting in a "pulling upward" manner, the long fibers of the muscle have been contracting and essentially pulling the cervix up and over the baby's head, similar to what you could imagine it would look like if you stood on your head and pulled on a turtle neck. This "pulling up" action helps to efface and dilate the cervix, and the baby moves down in the pelvis.

As second stage starts, the rest of the cervix disappears (if it hasn't already), the baby descends further into the pelvis and the urge to push is felt due to the pressure the presenting part puts on the large nerves in the lower pelvis. The action of the contractions changes from one of "pulling up" to one of pushing down. The short fibers of the uterine muscle now are doing their work and the uterus is shortening, from the top down, as the baby is moved into the birth canal.

There is often a pause between first and second stage. The contractions have been building and building and mom's voice has been getting higher and louder. That last contraction is really, really big. And then there is a pause. While contractions had been coming every 2 minutes or so, we now have maybe a 4- or 5-minute rest (sometimes longer, sometimes it isn't noticeable or is missed in the energy of the end of first stage).

Mom collects herself and the uterus seems to be collecting itself too, gearing up for the job of pushing the baby out. This rest may be the source of the "second wind" Melissa is asking about. Likely there is also a change in hormones coursing through the body (not really adrenaline at this time, though), and this gives added energy.

Whatever it is, now the pushing starts and mom gets down to business. She may have been having small urges to push at the peaks of contractions there at the end of first stage. Little catches in her breath or little grunty sounds as she exhales. Gradually, this urge to push gets longer and takes up more of the time of contraction. Eventually, as second stage becomes fully established, each contraction starts with a full-on urge to push and many women report there is no pain, just overwhelming power and intensity.

The energy totally changes from surrender to action. Whereas in first stage mom focuses inward and tries to stay as relaxed and grounded as possible, trying not to tense up, in order to allow the cervix to dilate, in second stage mom is active, working, awake and aware.

In this sense, what looks like a "second wind" is really just the evolution or progression of labor--a totally different energy is required to do the work of second stage than was required in first stage.

And then finally the Fetus Ejection Reflex--the baby's head reaches the floor of the pelvis. Mom gets scared and perhaps thinks she is going to die, she feels a rush of adrenaline and has a series of overwhelming, uncontrollable contractions that bring the baby to full crown and then birth.

So there you go. Not a short answer, but hopefully a complete one!

Haren Robinson, CPM, AM
Homebirth Midwife
303-665-7997