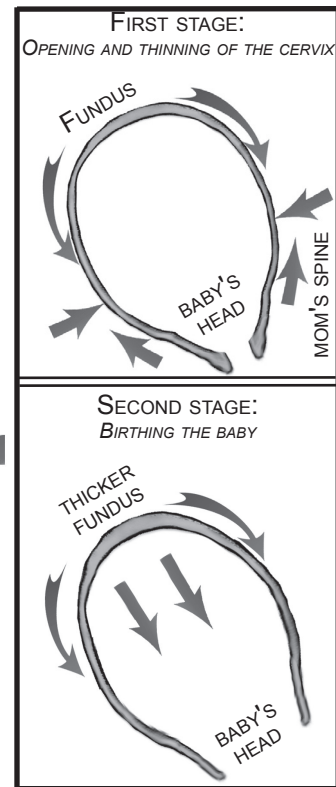
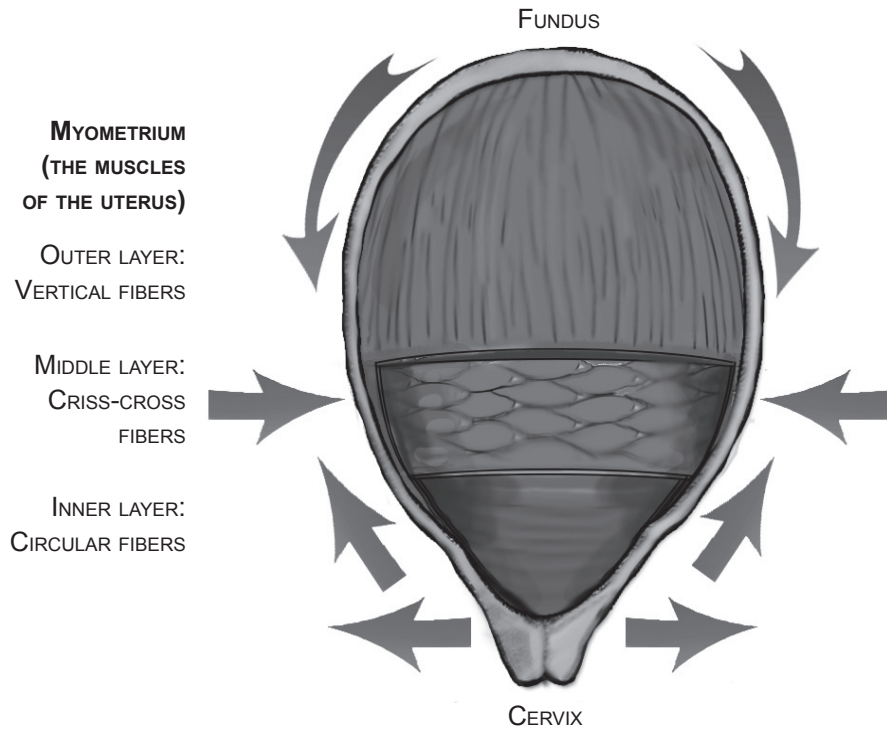


## The uterus



- The uterus may be the strongest muscle in the body for its weight. At full term, the uterus (not including contents) weighs about 2.5 pounds (1.1 kg) but can exert between 25 and 100 pounds (11-45 kg) of downward pressure with each contraction.<sup>65</sup>
- At full term, it has stretched to the size of a watermelon. By six weeks after birth, it has returned to the size and shape of an upside-down pear.<sup>66</sup>
- *(Diagram)* Contractions originate in the fundus, or top of the uterus. Vertical muscles stretch the cervix open against the baby's head. Crosshatching muscles compress the uterus. Circular bands pull the cervix open.
- The first stage of labor (early labor, active labor and transition) can be the longest. Contractions open and thin the cervix by pulling it against the baby's head (think of stretching a thick rubber band). This creates a feedback loop, releasing more oxytocin.
- As labor progresses, uterine muscles move upward, thickening the fundus. When that work is done, contractions change in form and function.
- During the second stage of labor the thickened top of the uterus now exerts more downward force as each contraction works to expel the baby from the mother's body. These contractions feel different, and are often a relief physically and emotionally.
- During the third stage of labor (releasing the placenta), uterine contractions shrink the uterus down, detaching and expelling the placenta. It usually takes less than 20 minutes. Enamored with the new baby, moms often don't notice much about it.
- Powered by oxytocin and breastfeeding, contractions continue to shrink the uterus, closing blood vessels left exposed by the detached placenta.
- **Hypnosis helps make muscles more efficient, reduces cervical resistance, and accelerates recovery.**