

# All about signs of labor



## What you need to know

### Congratulations!

After months of waiting, you are probably counting the days until you finally get to meet your baby. As your due date draws closer, knowing the signs of labor can help you feel ready for labor and birth.

However, if you are less than 37 weeks, seek medical attention immediately if you are experiencing any of the symptoms listed below.

### Signs of true labor may include the following:

- You have strong and regular contractions
- Your contractions come about 5 to 10 minutes apart and each last 40-60 seconds long for at least one hour
- Your contractions are so strong that you can't walk or talk during them
- The pain doesn't go away when you move or change positions

Every pregnancy is different. If this is your first baby, your labor can take up to 10-20 hours before the baby is born. For future births, you will most likely have a shorter labor.

## Signs that labor is near

### Dropping

In your final few weeks, you may have noticed that your baby has moved down lower in your abdomen. You will look and feel differently.

Your breasts probably no longer touch the top of your abdomen or you may find it easier to breathe. You might be able to sense your baby's head resting just beneath the middle of your pelvic bone.

### Frequent urination

Now that your baby's head lies closer to your bladder, you may be going to the bathroom more often.

## We offer maternity care right in your neighborhood!

### High-risk case management

If you are having problems with your pregnancy, our case managers will help and answer any questions you may have.

### Questions?

Call our Patient Assistance Line at  
**(888) 787-1712**

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### Low backache

As your baby gets heavier and drops lower, you may have some aches and pains in your lower back and pelvis. That is because your uterine and pelvic ligaments are being stretched even more.

### Stronger Braxton-Hicks contractions

Ah, Braxton Hicks contractions – the warm up contractions that often feel like painful menstrual cramps and probably have caught you off-guard a few times.

Though these pre-labor contractions are not as strong as actual labor, they are busy starting the work of thinning out (effacing) your cervix. While they will get even stronger just before labor, they can continue this way, on and off, for a week or two before actual labor starts.

### Diarrhea

As the time gets closer to your baby's birth, you may have cramps and loose, frequent bowel movements. This is your body's way of emptying your intestines to make more room for your baby to arrive. The hormones that cause this can also make you feel nauseous.

### More vaginal discharge

You may notice more egg white or pink-tinged vaginal discharge. This is another sign that labor is coming soon.

### Bloody show

When the baby's head moves into the pelvic cavity and the pre-labor contractions thin your cervix, the mucus plug that seals the cervix can be released. This can happen up to two weeks before you actually go into labor. The mucus can be stringy, thick, or gooey.

Some women notice the one-time passing of the plug while others just notice more blood-tinged vaginal discharge. Some of the tiny blood vessels in your cervix break as it thins, so you may see anything from a pink to brownish-red-tinged teaspoonful of bloody mucus.

If you notice blood like a menstrual period, let your doctor know right away. After you see your bloody show, you will most likely start your labor within another few days. You can use a panty liner, but do not insert tampons.

### Your water breaks

Contrary to what we see in movies, not every woman's water breaks when she is in labor. In fact, it only happens to one in ten mothers! If your water breaks before your labor starts, it should begin to intensify within the next few minutes or hours.

When your water breaks, it can feel like a big gush of fluid to a small, slow, steady trickle.

## Knowledge is power

If you have questions about your pregnancy, ask your doctor. You can also visit the following websites:

### March of Dimes:

[www.marchofdimes.org](http://www.marchofdimes.org)

### First 5 California:

[www.first5california.com](http://www.first5california.com)

*Remember: If you have any questions or concerns at any time, make sure you contact your doctor right away.*



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