



How can I tell whether my labor has actually started?

It is often difficult to pinpoint exactly when "true" labor begins because early labor contractions might start out feeling like the Braxton Hicks contractions you may have been noticing for weeks.

It's likely that labor is under way, however, when your contractions become increasingly longer, stronger, and closer together. They may be as far apart as every ten minutes or so in the beginning, but they won't stop or ease up no matter what you do. And in time, they'll become more painful and closer together. In some cases, though, the onset of strong, regular contractions comes with little or no warning. It's different for every woman and with every pregnancy.

When should I call my doctor or midwife?

- These instructions will depend on your individual situation — whether you have pregnancy complications or are otherwise considered high-risk, whether this is your first baby, and practical matters like how far you live from the hospital.
If your pregnancy is uncomplicated, you will be able to wait to come in for evaluation until you've been having contractions that last a minute each, come every five minutes and have been occurring for at least an hour. (Time the interval between contractions starting from the beginning of one contraction to the beginning of the next one). As a rule, if you're high-risk, we will want to hear from you earlier in labor.
- We can tell a lot by the sound of your voice, so verbal communication helps. We will want to talk with you directly. We will want to know how close together your contractions are, how long each one lasts, how strong they are and any other symptoms you may have. We may suggest that you stay at home longer until your symptoms become more intense. This is not because we don't want to see you! It is because we want you to be in active labor when you arrive at the hospital. Studies have shown that the farther dilated you are upon arrival to the hospital, the greater your chances are of delivering vaginally

Are there situations in which I should call my provider immediately?

Regardless of what kind of pregnancy you have been having, **we will want to hear from you right away in the following situations:**

- Your water breaks **and** you are positive GBS(Group B Strep)
- If your water breaks and it's dark yellow, brown, or greenish in color (regardless of GBS status), because this signals the presence of meconium, your baby's first stool, which is sometimes a sign of fetal stress. It is also important to let us know if the fluid looks bloody.
- If you are negative GBS and you feel that you broke your bag of water, please give us a call right away if it occurs during office hours. There are simple ways we can confirm that the loss of fluid you are experiencing is actually amniotic fluid and not urine or vaginal discharge. If it is after office hours when you break your bag of water and you are negative GBS, you certainly can put a pad on and call us at 8 am as long as the fluid is clear, the baby is moving around, and you are not in labor.
- You notice that your baby is less active. Many women have a harder time feeling subtle movements later in the pregnancy as the baby gets bigger and settles into place. If you are questioning the activity of your baby, please stop what you are doing, go home, hydrate



with three LARGE glasses of water and have a snack. Lie down on your side and count the movements in the next hour. Your baby should move a MINIMUM of 5 times during that hour. If you haven't counted five movements, give us a call right away.

- You have heavy vaginal bleeding, constant severe abdominal pain, or fever. Remember, bloody show after a vaginal exam or intercourse can be common. Heavy vaginal bleeding at any time is not.
- You start having contractions before 37 weeks or have any other signs of preterm labor.
- You have severe or persistent headaches that are unrelieved with tylenol, vision changes, intense pain or tenderness in your upper abdomen, or any other symptoms of preeclampsia.

Every pregnancy is different and no list can cover all situations, so if you're not sure whether a symptom is serious, or if you just don't feel like yourself or are uneasy, trust your instincts and give us a call. If there's a problem, you'll get help. If nothing's wrong, you'll be reassured.

If you have not delivered by 40 weeks we will set up a special appointment for evaluation of your baby's well-being between 40-41 weeks and make preparations for delivery before 42 weeks.

You can call any of our office numbers below. Calling after office hours is for emergencies and when you are in active labor. An answering service will pick up and put you in touch with the on call provider.

In the mean time, enjoy these last few weeks of pregnancy. Spend time with loved ones, go out to dinner, see a movie, read a book, and do the things you enjoy doing now that may be difficult to do when this little one first arrives!