

What to Do if You Think You are in Labor

General Information

Once your pregnancy is past 37 weeks gestation, you do not need to go the hospital as soon as your contractions begin.

Use the following information until you come to the hospital to deliver your baby or babies.

When to Call Your Health Care Provider

Call your health care provider **right away** if:

- you are bleeding from the vagina more than just spotting
- you have constant, severe pain with no relief between contractions.

Call your health care provider if:

- your water breaks (gush or trickle of fluid)
- your contractions are 5 minutes or less apart and have been that way for at least 1 hour or if your contractions become longer, stronger and closer together
- you have a temperature higher than 100.4 F
- you have any problems you know or think are related to your pregnancy
- you notice a decrease in your baby's activity.

Call your health care provider any time you think there is a problem.

Phone Numbers

Hospital:

Health care provider:

Clinic:

Others:

True Labor Versus False Labor

As you near your due date, your uterus may start to cramp. These cramps may become more uncomfortable or even painful. Irregular cramps are called Braxton Hicks contractions, or false labor. These cramps are normal and common.

A good way to tell if true labor from false labor is to time the contractions. If labor pains are weak, they are more difficult to time. It may be hard to tell true labor from false labor. Only a vaginal exam will show if true labor has begun.

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Time your contractions for 1 hour. If the following are true, you are likely in real labor and need to call the hospital:

- the contractions last at least 30 to 70 seconds
- the contractions occur regularly
- the contractions do not go away if you move around or lie down.

Comfort Measures

- Take a warm bath or shower if your bag of waters has not broken.
- Change your positions. If you are lying down, get up and walk around. If you are standing or walking, try lying on your left side with pillows to support you.
- Keep your bladder empty. A full bladder causes more contractions and can make you uncomfortable.
- Get as much rest as possible. Your uterus will be better able to go through labor.

Vaginal Discharge

- If you had a vaginal exam in the hospital or clinic, you may have a pinkish-brown discharge for up to 48 hours.
- If you have bloody show (blood-tinged or pink mucus), this may be an early sign of labor. Keep track of the time and date this occurs.

Food

- Unless your health care provider gives you other instructions, you may return to your regular diet.
- If early labor starts or continues, eat light foods. Good foods are toast, crackers, sandwiches and light soups.
- Drink enough liquids to keep your urine pale yellow in color. Good liquids are water, fruit juices and broth.