

Pre-Term Labor

Pre-term labor means going into labor before you finish your 37th week of pregnancy.

Pre-term (premature) labor and birth is the largest cause of newborn death and illness today. When babies are born prematurely, they are often small and may have problems with breathing, eating and maintaining body temperature. Some pre-term babies have ongoing illness and handicaps. You need to be aware of the early signs of pre-term labor.

- Dull, low backache. • Abdominal cramping, with or without diarrhea.
- Menstrual-like cramps. • Increase or change in vaginal discharge.
- Pelvic pressure.

Contractions:

It is normal for the uterus to contract occasionally. If you feel contractions (tightening of your uterus) more than 4 to 5 times in one hour, you may be in labor. As an example, place your hand on your calf muscle in your leg. As you hold your hand there, first point your toes and feel the looseness of that muscle. Keep your hand on the muscle and slowly pull your toe towards, your knee. Feel the tightness of the muscle as you do so.

It doesn't hurt to do this. Labor contractions may start the same way; they feel tight but may not hurt.

If you think you may be in labor, don't panic. Lie down on your left side and drink 2-3 glasses of water. If you have 5 or more contractions in an hour, or if the above signs are not gone in an hour, you need to call your OB provider right away. Let them know what you have been feeling and they will advise you. If you are leaking fluid from the vagina and are not sure if it is the membranes (bag of waters), call your OB provider immediately for advice.

If you feel you might be having pre-term labor,

Be sure to call your OB provider.

If you are diagnosed as having, pre-term labor, you will be specifically advised as to the proper care. You may be requested to limit your physical activity, restrict intercourse, get increased rest, modify or stop working, make more frequent visits to your doctor and, perhaps, take medication to suppress labor.

It is important to call or go to the hospital if you have symptoms. If you wait, labor may progress too far and medicine will not stop the contractions or the birth.