

my birth

labor begins

Normal labor can begin anytime after 37 weeks of pregnancy. The start of labor may look or feel different for each person. This handout will help you to understand:

- Signs that your labor is starting
- How to manage the start of labor at home
- When to call your midwife and go to the hospital



Signs labor is beginning

Early labor is your body's first steps as it prepares for birth.

Early labor can last several hours, or even an entire day, especially if this is your first baby. You will start to feel contractions more regularly and they will become more uncomfortable. It is important to try to rest and relax as much as you can during this part of labor. **You do not need to rush to the hospital at this time.**

Here is what you might expect as your labor begins

- Contractions vary - some are stronger, some less intense. They may not have a clear pattern over time. You might have several close together, then many spaced out.
- Many people feel cramping in the lower back and lower pelvis, like menstrual cramps.
- Taking a bath, changing positions, or laying down can help contractions go away or feel less intense. Walking and other movement might make contractions feel stronger.
- Drinking water may space out contractions or make them go away.

- You may notice slimy, sticky, or gooey discharge that is pink, brown, or a little bit red in color, coming from your vagina. This may happen over multiple days, and it is normal. This is called your “mucus plug.”

What to do in early labor

Drink

Stay hydrated by sipping water. If you feel dehydrated, try an electrolyte drink (e.g. Gatorade, Emergen-C, Smart Water, Nuun tablets, Recharge).

Eat

Snack on food with protein and carbohydrates (e.g. protein bar, chicken noodle soup, nut butter, or honey sticks).

Distract yourself

If you are planning to go to the hospital only once you are in active labor, it's best to distract yourself in the beginning and begin using your home coping techniques (see below) only when it's impossible to ignore the contractions. Ideas to consider: Bake a cake, watch a long movie or TV series marathon, call a friend and chat.

Plan

Call your doula and make a plan for when they will come to be with you. You can also call the midwife to let them know that contractions are starting to become more regular.

Time

Once your contractions can't be ignored, you can begin to time them. There are apps that are helpful with this. Your midwife will want to know how long it is between the start of one contraction and the start of the next. They will also want to know how long it is from the beginning of the contraction to the end of that same contraction.

How to handle labor contractions while at home

Breathe

Practice breathing in through your nose and out through your mouth over and over throughout each of your contractions, until the contraction goes away.

Rest

Rest your upper body over a yoga ball, a couch cushion, or the edge of your bed between contractions. Leaning your body forward and letting your belly hang like a hammock can help take pressure off of your pelvis and back. You can even try sitting on the toilet backwards, resting your head on a pillow (this can help you keep your lower body relaxed).

Heat

Ask someone to hold a heating pad on your lower back or take a warm bath or shower.

Pressure

Ask someone to push on your lower back or squeeze your hips together or put pressure against any spot where you are feeling back pain with their hand during contractions

Move

Switch labor positions after every five contractions (or about every half hour). Some movements to try are:

- Take a walk if you have energy. Be sure to take lots of rest breaks.
- Dance or sway your hips while listening to your favorite music.
- Rock or bounce on an exercise ball or in a rocking chair.
- Squat, get onto your hands and knees, lie on your side, or stand and lean against something (or someone)

What might I expect as labor progresses?

- Contractions will get closer together and more intense over time.
- The cramping might move from your lower back or low pelvis and spread across your whole belly up to your rib cage.
- Getting in the bath will not stop your contractions; and they continue to come close together (every 3-5 minutes) no matter what position you try.
- Drinking two large glasses of water and laying down will not stop/slow down contractions.
- Your water may or may not break/release. Only about 2 in 10 people have their water break before contractions start.

When to call your midwife

These are signs it might be time to go to the hospital. Call your midwife (do not text) if you experience *any* of the following:

- Your contractions are 4 minutes apart, each contraction lasts about one minute, you can't walk or talk through them (and it takes a lot of effort and focus to breathe through them), and all of that has been happening for an hour.
- Water is coming out of your vagina, running down your leg, or leaking out when you move around. This may mean that your water has broken. You should call even if you aren't having contractions.
- You don't feel the baby moving.
- You have bleeding from your vagina that soaks your underwear or a pad. It may look like your period is starting.
- If you are not yet 37 weeks pregnant, and think that your water has broken, you are having painful contractions or period-like cramps, or are bleeding from your vagina.

It's often hard to know when it's time to go to the hospital. When you call your midwife, they will talk with you to make a plan about when to leave home.



When to call 911

- You feel the need to push or strain down like you're having a bowel movement.
- You think your baby is coming.