



How to Detect Preterm Labor

Preterm Labor is when the mother has **contractions** (*her uterine muscles tighten*) and the cervix **dilates** (*or opens*) too early. Your baby is starting to be born before 37 completed weeks of pregnancy. Learning the signs of preterm labor may help keep your baby from being born too early.

No one really knows what causes preterm labor. There are certain things that seem to increase a woman's chances of having preterm labor:

- *Smoking*
- *Frequent urinary tract infections*
- *Having Twins*
- *Having preterm labor or a preterm baby with a previous pregnancy*

Warning signs of preterm labor include:

- *Uterine contractions 15 or fewer minutes apart. Your abdomen tightens or feels hard four or more times an hour.*
- *Cramps that feel like menstrual cramps just above the pubic bone that are either constant or come and go.*
- *A low, dull backache that is either constant or comes and goes and does not go away when you change positions.*
- *Pelvic pressure that feels like the baby is pushing down.*
- *Abdominal cramping that may feel like a bad case of gas pains. Diarrhea may also occur.*
- *An increase or change in vaginal discharge than usual, or it is more mucousy or watery, there's a change in color, or becomes pink or bloody.*
- *Fluid leaking from the vagina.*
- *A general bad feeling or feeling that something is not right.*

What to do if you have warning signs of preterm labor:

- *Empty your bladder.*
- *Lie down on your left side and rest.*
- *Drink three to four large glasses of water.*
- *Feel for uterine contractions and time them. Keep track of the minutes from beginning of one contraction to the beginning of the next, or keep track of the number of contractions in ONE hour.*

CALL YOUR DOCTOR OR MID-WIFE....

- *If you have vaginal bleeding or fluid leaking from your vagina.*
- *If after an hour of rest, fluids, and feeling and timing contractions:*

- *your contractions are still 15 minutes apart or closer (more than FOUR an hour)*
- *backache, pressure, or cramping has not stopped.*
- *you think anything is wrong.*

Preterm labor and birth cannot always be avoided, but if you follow these guidelines, you can reduce the chances of your baby being born early.

- *Visit your doctor or nurse for regularly scheduled visits.*
- *Drink AT LEAST two quarts of decaffeinated liquid each day.*
- *Rest and relax on your left side each day.*
- *Avoid strenuous activities like heavy lifting, furniture moving, and some forms of exercise.*
- *Tell your doctor or mid-wife about the kind of work you do, what duties you perform, stressful situations, long hours, etc.*
- *Decrease or eliminate stressful situations in your life.*
- *After intercourse, empty your bladder, drink two to three glasses of water, rest on your left side for a half hour or longer.*
- *Avoid nipple preparation for breast feeding.*
- *Do not travel long distances or make significant altitude changes. If traveling by car, stop every hour or two to get some exercise, stretch your legs, drink water, and empty your bladder.*
- **STOP SMOKING.**
- **DO NOT DRINK ALCOHOL.** *This includes beer and wine.*
- *Notify your doctor or mid-wife if you are having symptoms of a vaginal or bladder infection.*
- *Empty your bladder frequently.*
- *Eat a healthy diet so you gain enough weight to allow your baby to grow properly.*

For more information contact our office 970-243-7908 or visit marchofdimes.com or www.rmhp.com.