

Signs of Labor

	Sign	When it occurs	Comments
Possible signs of labor: These may or may not be signs of labor; time will tell	Lightening: Engagement (baby's head drops or settles deep into pelvis)	Few weeks to a few hours prior to labor	Mom feels less pressure on lungs and stomach but more on bladder
	Nesting: An unusual burst of energy and impulse to finish up preparations for baby	A day or two prior to labor	Mom should not become overtired; save energy for the big event
	Flu-like symptoms: Mild diarrhea, intestinal cramps, or nausea	Hours to days prior to labor	Mom should rest, drink fluids, call care provider if symptoms become severe (refer to "Warning Signs During Pregnancy" for when to call)
	Backache: Vague, low, nagging back pain, may be caused by early contractions	Weeks before to during labor	Mom should try pelvic tilts, warmth, cold pack, massage, positioning
	Menstrual-like cramps: uterine muscles tighten	May occur any time	These may be intermittent or continuous; Mom can try warm baths, positioning
	Loss of mucus plug: increased vaginal discharge	Hours to days before labor	Bathe daily; if concerned refer to "Vaginal Infections" handout
Early signs of labor: These are signs of progress but still early or preliminary labor	Bloody show: blood-tinged mucus passes from vagina as cervix thins (effaces) and opens (dilates)	Several days prior to onset of labor or at start and throughout labor Note: You may see some blood-tinged mucus after an exam or sexual intercourse. This is normal but is not the same as a bloody show before labor.	Mom should pack, rest, and be ready when labor begins If bright red bleeding occurs, call your care provider

<p>Early signs: continued</p>	<p>Warm-up contractions: weak to strong uterine muscle tightening or pain may continue for hours and then stop; tend to stay about the same length, strength and frequency; may help to soften, thin, and begin dilating the cervix</p>	<p>May occur at any time</p>	<p>Mom should use relaxation and comfort measures to cope with contractions; avoid heavy meals, continue to drink fluids</p>
<p>Positive signs of labor: These are the clearest signs of labor</p>	<p>Progressive contractions: usually painful and strong uterine muscle tightenings, felt in back, abdomen, and/or thighs; they become longer, stronger, and closer together with time</p> <p>Rupture of membranes: may be continuous dampness or trickle of water to a gush of fluid from the vagina caused by a tear in the amniotic sac</p>	<p>Throughout labor</p> <p>Several hours prior to start of contractions to any time during labor</p> <p>Note: Can be confused with leakage of urine which is normal during pregnancy; if it is urine, you can stop the flow with Kegel exercise.</p>	<p>See handout “Labor from Start to Finish”</p> <p>Mom should contact her care provider Note: Color Odor Amount Time</p> <p>Wearing a minipad may be helpful</p>

If you are having any of the above signs of labor before your 37th week of pregnancy, you may be having preterm labor and should contact your care provider.

Warm-up contractions

- Generally tighten only portions of the uterus, rarely with back pressure
- Usually of short duration (15 to 45 seconds)
- May not become closer together
- Do not increase in intensity
- Usually irregular in occurrence
- Changing activity or position may make them stop
- Walking does not make them stronger
- May cause cervix to soften, thin, tilt forward or begin dilating

Progressive contractions

- Generally tighten entire uterus and may be felt as back pressure or in low abdomen
- Become progressively longer in duration (up to 60 seconds)
- Become closer together
- Become progressively stronger in intensity
- Most often become regular in occurrence
- Changing activity or position does not make them stop
- Walking may make them stronger
- Causes cervix to thin (efface) and open (dilate)

The information presented is intended for general information and educational purposes. It is not intended to replace the advice of your health care provider. Contact your health care provider if you believe you have a health problem.