



2000 Medical Parkway, Ste. 304
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

SIGNS OF LABOR – WHAT TO EXPECT

There isn't any specific pattern for how labor will begin or progress. Some women may experience several days or weeks of early stages of labor and even "false labor", while others won't have much warning at all. But for many women there will be some indication that you are starting the labor process.

Labor Signs and Symptoms:

Lightening, also referred to as the baby dropping, is the process of your baby moving down lower into your pelvis. This usually occurs from a few weeks to a few hours before labor begins. As a result, it may become easier to breathe, however you might start urinating more as the baby may be resting on your bladder. You may also feel more pressure in your lower pelvis.

Increase in vaginal discharge, may be clear, pink, or slightly bloody. A thick mucus plug has accumulated at the cervix during pregnancy to prevent bacteria from entering the cervix. When the cervix begins to dilate, the plug is pushed into the vagina. This may be referred to as **passing your mucous plug** or a **bloody show**. You may lose your mucus plug all at once, or it may happen over time. You may notice an increased discharge that is thick and stringy or pinkish red mucus. A small amount of red spotting may occur, but should not be a flow. If there is a continuous flow of bleeding please contact our office immediately.

Diarrhea and nausea may also occur early in labor due to hormonal changes taking place. If you are nauseous it is best not to eat, but you can drink water.

Rupture of Membranes commonly referred to as your **water breaking**. This happens when the amniotic sac around the baby breaks and allows for a leaking or flow of amniotic fluid. It may be a gush or burst of fluids or it may just be a steady trickle. If this happens, please contact our office. This can happen while you are having contractions, or it may occur with no warning at all. Sometimes this doesn't happen until you get to the hospital, or your provider may rupture the membranes to assist with labor.

Effacement is the process of your cervix softening and thinning out. This process can take weeks. You may not feel this happening at all or you may experience some cramping or **Braxton Hicks** contractions. These contractions can be mild to moderate, and are usually irregular and will not increase in intensity. Many women experience these contractions as a tightening feeling across the belly. Your healthcare provider will identify these changes during your vaginal exams.

Dilation is the process of your cervix beginning to open (dilate) to prepare for child birth. Your health care provider will check your cervix for these changes, usually starting at 36 weeks.

Contractions may be difficult to assess in the early stages and may start and stop for weeks. The common contractions women experience as "tightening" across their abdomen are called **Braxton Hicks** contractions. You may notice these contractions occurring more frequently in the final weeks of pregnancy. They may be mild or even moderately intense as you get closer to your delivery date. Often this can be referred to as "**false labor**". **Labor contractions** will definitely be more uncomfortable and continue to increase in intensity. False labor will generally not progress to very intense contractions that get closer together and will usually subside if you go for a walk or try to relax. **When you are able to**

time your contractions and they are getting close to 5 minutes apart (timing them from the start of one contraction to the start of the next), they are lasting one full minute and continuing this way for one hour, then you are usually in labor and should contact our office. During true labor nothing you can do will help the contractions subside. They will continue to increase in intensity and it will become difficult to talk through them.

Contraction Characteristics	False Labor	True Labor
How often do the contractions occur?	Contractions are often irregular and do not get closer together.	Contractions come at regular intervals and last about 30-70 seconds. As time progresses, they get closer together.
Do they change with movement?	Contractions may stop when you walk or rest, or may even stop if you change positions.	Contractions continue despite movement or changing positions.
How strong are they?	Contractions are usually weak and do not get much stronger. Or they may be strong at first and then get weaker.	Contractions steadily increase in strength.
Where do you feel the pain?	Contractions are usually only felt in the front of the abdomen or pelvic region.	Contractions usually start in the lower back and move to the front of the abdomen.

When to contact our office?

- Please contact us if you are less than 38 weeks and having contractions 4-6 times an hour.
- Once you are in labor you can use the **5-1-1 guidelines** as above: if your contractions are every 5 minutes apart, lasting for 1 minute, and continuing for 1 hour. Please contact us.
- If you are having any bright red bleeding that is a flow, more than when you wipe.
- If you experience severe headaches or blurred vision.
- If you are having any pain or burning with urination.