



# **What is Labour & When to Come to the Hospital**

**Patient Information Booklet**

*Leading, Learning,  
Caring For You*

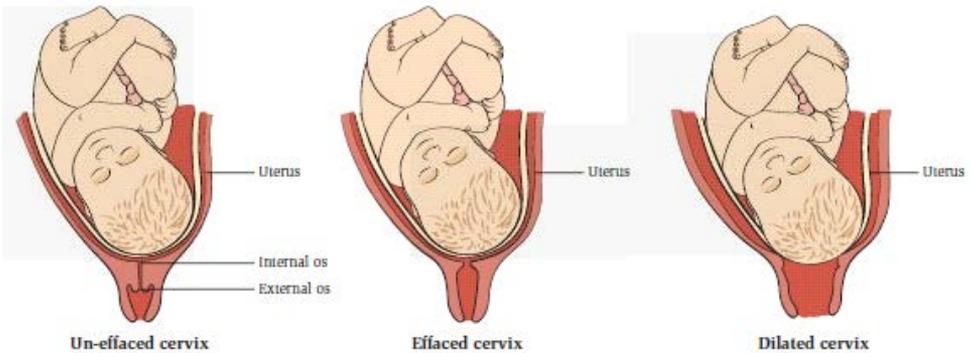
**Adapted from Best Start by Health Nexus**

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# WHAT IS LABOUR?

Labour is the work your uterus does to help the baby come out. For many hours, your uterus will tighten (contract), rest, and then tighten (contract) again. This makes the opening of the uterus (cervix) get thinner (efface) and open (dilate).

## The Thinning and Opening of the Cervix



### Efface

Your cervix gets thinner (effaces) before it opens (dilates).

### Dilate

Your cervix will open (dilate) to about 10 cm (4 inches) before your baby comes out.

## Contractions

A contraction occurs when the uterus gets tight, rests, and then gets tight again. You will feel many contractions when you are in labour. The “pain of childbirth” comes mainly from the contractions. When your cervix opens to 10 cm, your contractions and your pushing will move the baby down the birth canal (vagina) and out into the world.

Labour and birth is a natural and important process for your body. Your hormones are preparing your body and your baby for the transition from the womb to the outside world. Trust the process.

For more information, see *Pathway to a Healthy Birth* at

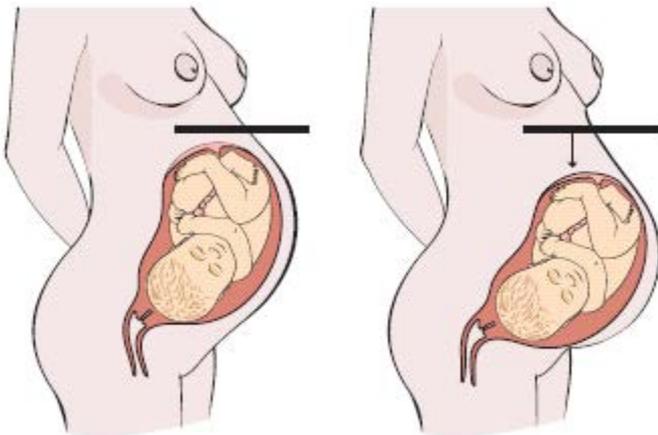
**[www.nationalpartnership.org/research-library/maternal-health/pathway-to-a-healthy-birth-booklet.pdf](http://www.nationalpartnership.org/research-library/maternal-health/pathway-to-a-healthy-birth-booklet.pdf)**

## What are the signs of labour?

There are some normal signs that tell you that your labour may begin soon. Most women go into labour within a week of their due date. If you have signs of labour before you are 37 weeks pregnant, go to the hospital or birthing centre right away.

### (1) Lightening

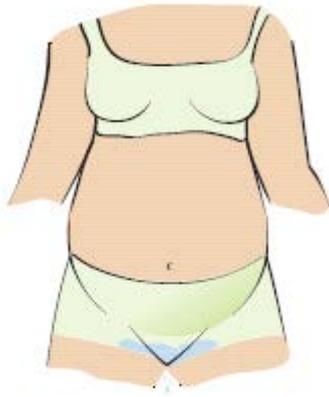
Near the end of your pregnancy, your baby will move down. When this happens you will be able to breathe better. You will feel less burning in your chest and throat after you eat. You will have to pass urine more often. If this is your first baby, this may happen 2 to 3 weeks before you go into labour. If this is not your first baby, this may not happen until closer to the time you will give birth.



Baby drops  
lowers near  
the end of  
pregnancy

## **(2) Mucous Plug**

While you are pregnant, you have a thick mucous plug in your cervix. As the baby's birth gets closer, your cervix begins to thin and open, and the plug may come out. If this happens you will notice thick mucous on your underwear, or in the toilet, or you may not notice it at all. You do not need to come to the hospital if you are not in labour.

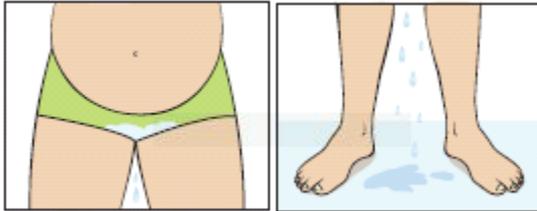


## **(3) Bloody Show**

You may notice a pink, red, or brown discharge a few days before labour or during labour. This is called bloody show. It is a sign of your cervix changing shape and the mucous plug coming out. Tell your health care provider when this happens.

#### **(4) Bag of Water Breaks**

Your baby is inside a bag of water (amniotic sac) in your uterus. When the baby is ready to be born it is normal for the bag of water to break. This may happen before labour starts, early in labour or when the baby is almost ready to be born. When it happens, you may have a little or a lot of water leaking from your vagina. Sometimes women do not know whether this is water from their uterus or urine. If you are not sure, call your health care provider.



When your bag of water breaks:

- Write down the time that your bag of water broke.
- Look at the colour of the water (it should be clear).
- Notice if there is a smell (it should not smell).
- Do not use a tampon – use a pad in your underwear or towel if needed.
- Call your health care provider or hospital for instructions.

## (5) Contractions

Late in your pregnancy you may have contractions (uterus tightens, rests, and tightens again) that are very strong. They may come and go for hours or days and then stop.

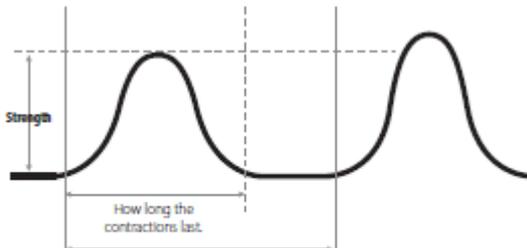
These contractions are helping your womb (uterus) get ready for birth and are called **pre-labour** or Braxton-Hicks contractions. The chart below will help you know when you are really in labour.

<b>Pre-labour contractions</b>	<b>True labour contractions</b>
Do not get stronger. Do not become regular. Go away with walking. Feel strongest in front. There is no bloody show. Tend to go away with rest.	Get stronger. Become regular and closer together. Get stronger when you walk. May begin in back and move to front. Bloody show is usually present.

# How do you time your contractions?

By learning how to time your contractions, you will know when you are in true labour. Time your contractions when the contractions come closer together and/or the contractions get stronger or when your water breaks.

It is also helpful to time for at least 3 contractions in a row to see what the pattern is.



*How far apart the contractions are*

Write down:

- When each contraction begins and ends.
- How far apart the contractions are.
- How long each contraction lasts.
- How strong the contractions feel.



Everyone's experiences in labour are unique; what works for one mother may not work for you. It is important that you find a pain control method that works for you.

While you are at home, you can try some of the pain control methods listed below. **It is important that you give these a try prior to coming to the hospital; all of these options are very effective and will assist you to relax which will help your labour progress safely.**

### **Relaxation**

- Have a few different types of playlists/CDs on hand—sometimes relaxing music is very helpful, other times you may want something more upbeat.
- Experiment with different types of lighting.
- Drink plenty of fluids and eat snacks like toast and tea. Remember, being nauseated in labour is unpleasant but normal.

## **Water**

- Soak in a shower, Jacuzzi or tub bath
- Take a warm shower with water flowing on your belly or back.
- Make sure you have help getting in and out of the tub.

## **Breathing Techniques**

- When a contraction starts, take a big deep breath in and breath out, continue this throughout the contraction (Do not breath too quick, you will get dizzy). When the contraction ends, take another big deep breath in and out.
- Focus on resting as much as you possibly can in between contractions.

## **Massage**

- Have your support person massage your lower back; use constant pressure during contractions. Massage oil may be helpful.
- Try light stroking or circling movement on your belly.
- Between contractions you may like someone to massage your hands, feet, neck or shoulders.
- Try a variety of tools like hands, a rolling pin, or tennis balls.

## **Positions/movement**

- Use different positions while you are having a contraction – leaning against a wall or your support person, squatting, kneeling or on all fours.
- Find a balance between rest and activity.

## When should you go to your place of birth?

- If you are bleeding from your vagina.
- When your contractions are 5 minutes apart or less, are stronger, longer and **regular** (your health care provider may ask you to go to the hospital earlier).
- When your water breaks.
- You are unable to deal with the pain.
- If you are planning a home birth, contact your midwife when you have signs of labour.

It is best to stay at home during early labour. Resting, taking a shower, going for a walk or watching a movie are all great ways to cope with early labour.

If you are unsure of whether you should come to the hospital, please call the Labour Room, 613-732-2811 extension 6438.

**STAYING AT HOME AS LONG AS YOU CAN WILL ENABLE YOU TO MOVE FREELY WITHOUT MEDICAL TREATMENT. IT IS SCIENTIFICALLY PROVEN THAT MEDICAL TREATMENTS GIVEN TOO EARLY MAY INCREASE YOUR CHANCE OF HAVING A CAESARIAN SECTION.**