



WOMEN'S
Medical Center

Am I in Labor?

What is labor?

Labor is the work that your body does to birth your baby. Your uterus (the womb) contracts. Your cervix (the mouth of the uterus) opens. You will push your baby out into the world.

What do contractions (labor pains) feel like?

When they first start, contractions usually feel like cramps during your period. Sometimes you feel pain in your back. Most often, contractions feel like muscles pulling painfully in your lower belly. At first, the contractions will probably be 15 to 20 minutes apart. They will not feel too painful. As labor goes on, the contractions get stronger, closer together, and more painful.

How do I time the contractions?

Time your contractions by counting the number of minutes from the start of one contraction to the start of the next contraction.

What should I do when the contractions start?

- If it is night and you can sleep, sleep. If it happens during the day, here are some things you can do to take care of yourself at home:
- Walk. If the pains you are having are real labor, walking will make the contractions come faster and harder. If the contractions are not going to continue and be real labor, walking will make the contractions slow down.
- Take a shower or bath. This will help you relax.
- Eat. Labor is a big event. It takes a lot of energy.
- Drink water. Not drinking enough water can cause false labor (contractions that hurt but do not open your cervix). If this is true labor, drinking water will help you have strength to get through your labor.
- Take a nap. Get all the rest you can.
- Get a massage. If your labor is in your back, a strong massage on your lower back may feel very good. Getting a foot massage is always good.
- Don't panic. You can do this. Your body was made for this. You are strong!

When should I call?

- Your contractions have been 5 minutes apart or less for at least 1 hour.
- If several contractions are so painful you cannot walk or talk during one.
- Your bag of waters breaks. (You may have a big gush of water or just water that runs down your legs when you walk.)

Are there other reasons to call?

Yes, you should call your health care provider or go to the hospital if you start to bleed like you are having a period—blood that soaks your underwear or runs down your legs, if you have sudden severe pain, if your baby has not moved for several hours, or if you are leaking green fluid. The rule is as follows: If you are very concerned about something, call.