

Am I in Labor?



What is labor?

Labor is the work that your body does to birth your baby. Your uterus (the womb) contracts (tightens). The contractions (labor pains) push your baby down onto your cervix (the opening of your uterus). This pressure causes your cervix to open. When your cervix is completely open (10 centimeters dilated), you will push your baby through your vagina and out into the world.

What do contractions feel like?

When contractions first start, they 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 may be irregular and will not feel too painful. As labor goes on, the contractions get stronger, closer together, more consistent, and more painful.

How do I time the contractions?

When the contractions seem to be coming regularly, you should start to time them. You 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 during early labor when the contractions start?

If it is night and you can sleep, do so. If it happens during the day, there 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 closer together and they will be stronger, but you will be able to cope with them better if you are standing or moving around. If the contractions are early labor ones that come and go (sometimes called false labor), walking can make them go away.
- **Take a shower or bath.** This will help you relax.
- **Eat.** Labor is a big event. Your body needs a lot of energy to be effective. Eat whatever you feel like eating.
- **Drink water.** Not drinking enough water can cause contractions to not be as effective as they should be. You need to be well hydrated (drinking enough water) to help your body work well during labor.
- **Take a nap.** If you feel tired, lay down on your side and get all the rest you can. It helps to be rested when you go into active labor.
- **Do something you enjoy.** Spend time with family. Watch a movie. Distraction will help you relax.
- **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 or having a partner rub your feet can also be very relaxing.
- **Don't panic.** You can do this. Your body was made for this. You are strong!

When should I call my health care provider if I think I am in labor?

- Your contractions have been 5 minutes or less apart for at least an hour.
- Your contractions are becoming so painful you cannot walk or talk during one.
- You think your amniotic sac (bag of waters) breaks. You may have a big gush of amniotic fluid (water) or just fluid that runs down your legs when you walk or move or change position.

Are there other reasons to call my health care provider?

If you are concerned about anything, don't hesitate to call your health care provider. You should definitely call your health care provider or go to the hospital if:

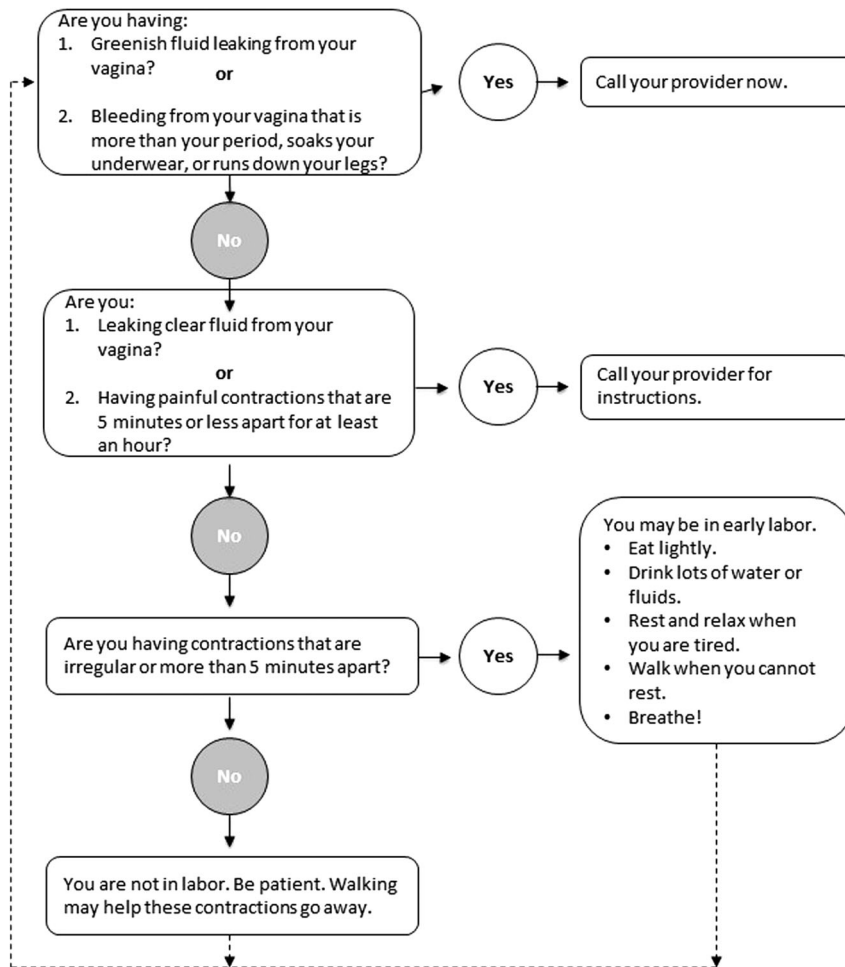
- It is 3 weeks or more before your due date, and you are having contractions.
- You have vaginal bleeding that is more than your period, soaks your underwear, or runs down your legs.
- You have sudden severe pain that does not go away with rest.



- Your baby has not moved for several hours.
- You are leaking greenish fluid.

What do I do if I think I am in labor?

If you are 37 weeks or more along in your pregnancy, follow this decision path:



For More Information

Baby Center: Signs that you are in labor

<http://www.babycentre.co.uk/signs-for-how-I-will-know-I-am-in-labour>

US Department of Health and Human Services: Signs of labor, labor stages, and types of birth

<http://www.womenshealth.gov/pregnancy/childbirth-beyond/labor-birth.html>

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