

Signs and Symptoms of Preterm Labor and What to Do

What is preterm labor?

Preterm or premature labor happens when you go into labor before 37 completed weeks of pregnancy. This is too early for your baby to be born. Babies born too soon can have lifelong or life-threatening health problems.

Can preterm labor be stopped?

Many women are able to be treated to delay or stop labor. In some cases, birth can be delayed long enough to transport Mom to a hospital with a neonatal intensive care unit (NICU). There are also treatments that can be done to improve the baby's health, even if the baby comes early.

Warning Signs

- Contractions (your abdomen tightens like a fist) every 10 minutes or more often
- Change in vaginal discharge (leaking fluid or bleeding from your vagina)
- Pelvic pressure—the feeling that your baby is pushing down
- Low, dull backache
- Cramps that feel like your period
- Abdominal cramps with or without diarrhea

What should I do if I think I'm having preterm labor?

Call your health care provider (doctor or midwife) or go to the hospital right away if you think you're having preterm labor, or if you have any of the warning signs. Call even if you have only one sign.

Your health care provider may tell you to:

- Come into the office or go to the hospital for a checkup.
- Stop what you're doing. Rest on your left side for one hour.
- Drink 2-3 glasses of water or juice (not coffee or soda).

If the symptoms get worse or do not go away after one hour, call your provider again or go to the hospital. If the symptoms get better, relax for the rest of the day.

What if I have a history of preterm labor or preterm birth?

Talk to your midwife immediately if you haven't already. You may be a candidate for additional treatments to decrease the risk of preterm labor and or birth occurring again.

You can find more information on this topic and others at www.marchofdimes.com