



Women's Health Specialists

Is This Labor?

It can be difficult to tell if you are in labor. This is to help you decide when to go to the birthing center, on the 2nd floor of Washington Hospital. Please call the birthing center at 510-791-3424 to advise them you are in labor and coming in. They will contact the doctor on call.

Contractions:

Braxton-Hicks contractions are practice contractions that prepare the uterus weeks before true labor begins. They vary in timing and level of discomfort and are usually felt as tightening or hardening of the uterus. Sometimes they are felt only in the low back.

“False labor” is when you have contractions, but they are irregular in timing, intensity and duration. To time contractions you time from the beginning of one contraction to the beginning of the next one.

“True labor” is when your contractions are at regular intervals, become progressively stronger and last longer over time.

The time to go to the birthing center is when your contractions are 5 minutes apart (from beginning of one to the beginning of the next), last at least 40 seconds, and are strong enough for you to have to stop what you are doing to make it through the contraction. The contractions should stay like this for 1-2 hours before you go to the hospital.

LEAKING FROM THE BAG OF WATER (AMNIOTIC SAC):

The baby is surrounded by the bag of waters, which may break or leak before or during labor. A large gush of fluid is easy to identify, but sometimes the fluid just trickles out a little at a time. If you aren't sure if your water bag is broken, wear a sanitary pad and walk around for 30 minutes. If the pad is soaked, then call or go in. If there is just mucus on the pad, then most likely this is increase in discharge (common near the end of pregnancy-see mucus plug). The amniotic fluid is usually clear and odorless. Occasionally it will have a yellow or green tinge. Go to the birthing center if you think your water bag is broken, even if you are not experiencing contractions. Please call the birthing center first.

THE MUCUS PLUG:

The cervix (opening to the uterus) makes mucus as a protective barrier. Near the end of pregnancy, a large amount of mucus, which can sometimes be mixed with blood, may pass through the vagina. This is called the mucus plug. Sometimes it signals early labor, but it can be a few days or weeks before labor begins.

You do not need to call about the mucus plug.

BLOODY SHOW:

With contractions (even Braxton-Hicks contractions) the cervix starts to soften and thin. This can disrupt small blood vessels and cause bleeding. Blood mixed with mucus is called bloody show and is not worrisome. If you have bleeding like a period or heavier, go to the birthing center. Please call the birthing center first.

FETAL MOVEMENT:

Often during early labor the baby will decrease its level of activity, but the baby should still be moving. If you don't feel regular movement, lie down on your side, eat or drink something, and concentrate on feeling movements. You should feel 10 movements within 2 hours. If not, go to the birthing center. Please call the birthing center first.

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