



During the last weeks of your pregnancy, you will meet more frequently with your obstetrical provider. You will learn a lot about how to monitor your progress and when to call your provider. Here are some of the things you might discuss with your provider.

☞ Most babies are born between 37 and 42 weeks of pregnancy. Labor that starts before 37 weeks is known as “preterm labor.” Preterm delivery increases the risk of health problems for your baby. Let your provider know right away if you have any symptoms of labor (see box) before 37 weeks.

☞ Most women have frequent “practice” contractions, or tightenings of the uterine muscle during the last weeks of pregnancy. These contractions are usually not painful and should not occur more than four times an hour.

☞ Contractions that come with the onset of true labor are usually painful, more frequent, and come with other symptoms.

Am I in labor?

Symptoms of labor vary from woman to woman. Labor for one pregnancy may be different from labor for the next. Here are some general guidelines that may help you decide if you are in labor.

*It **might** be labor if:*

- ✓ contractions start to occur at regular intervals
- ✓ contractions occur more than four times an hour
- ✓ contractions begin to last longer and get stronger and closer together
- ✓ contractions continue after drinking several glasses of water
- ✓ contractions continue when you change positions, rest, or empty your bladder
- ✓ there is a bloody discharge from the vagina
- ✓ there is gushing, leaking, or trickling of water from the vagina (broken bag of water, or ruptured membranes)

☞ Early labor is sometimes called the “latent phase.” During this time, your cervix (the opening to the uterus) begins to thin and open. Contractions are usually mild or moderately uncomfortable, coming every 5 to 20 minutes. This phase may last a few hours or even longer, especially in first pregnancies.

☞ In general, we recommend that healthy women stay at home during the latent phase. Spend some time walking and some time resting. Do what is comfortable for you. Drink plenty of fluids and eat lightly (to avoid nausea and vomiting). Use techniques to help you relax, such as slow, deep breathing. Some women find a bath or shower comforting.

☞ If at any time there is fluid gushing or even slowly leaking from the vagina, call your provider. This may indicate ruptured membranes, also known as a broken bag of water. Your provider will advise you as to next steps if this happens.

☞ As labor progresses, your contractions will start to get stronger and closer together. Contractions may be 3 to 5 minutes apart, and last 45 to 90 seconds each. You may have trouble talking during your contractions. These symptoms usually signal the onset of the “active phase” of labor, when dilation progresses more rapidly. Women are normally admitted to the hospital once the active phase has begun.

☞ Talk with your provider about when you should call or come to the hospital. Your provider will consider your stage of labor and other factors such as where you live and your previous history in deciding when you should call or come to the hospital.

☞ *Continued*

👉 When you come to the hospital, come to the EAST CAMPUS and enter through the Feldberg lobby, which is the main east campus entrance at 330 Brookline Ave. From the lobby, proceed to the 10th floor. Wheelchairs are available in the lobby if you need one. There is a garage next to the lobby, and discounted parking is available if you have your parking ticket validated in the lobby.

Who will support you in labor?

👉 You choose who will best support you during your labor and the birth of your baby. As your due date approaches, be sure you have talked to those who will be supporting you about what you need.

👉 It's a good idea to let other family and friends know ahead of time that you'd prefer they wait to visit until you are in your post-partum room.

👉 Our staff will welcome those supporting you in your room. On occasion, staff may need to limit the number of people in the room for safety or privacy reasons.

What are normal fetal movements?

You should feel your baby move daily. If you think your baby is not moving normally or there is a change from what you have normally been experiencing, you may want to do a kick count. Most women don't need to do this, but in certain circumstances your provider may ask you to count how many times your baby moves. Ideally you want 10 movements in 2 hours. A movement can be a kick, a swish, a turn, or a flip of the baby.

Should I call my obstetrical provider?

You and your doctor will talk in detail about when you should call or come to the hospital once labor has begun.

In general, **if this is your first baby**, you should call your doctor if you have one hour of regular contractions that:

- you are unable to talk through, and
- are 45 to 60 seconds long, and
- occur every three minutes if you live within 30 minutes of the hospital, or occur every five minutes if you live farther away.

In general, **if this is not your first baby**, you should call your doctor if you have one hour of regular contractions that:

- you are unable to talk through, and
- are 45 to 60 seconds long, and
- occur every five minutes if you live within 30 minutes of the hospital, or occur every ten minutes if you live farther away.

IMPORTANT: The guidelines given here should be used only if you are 37 weeks pregnant or more. If you experience any symptoms of labor before 37 weeks, please call your provider right away.

Call for ruptured membranes: As noted, please call any time you have a gush or trickle of fluid from the vagina, whether or not there are contractions.

In any emergency, please call 911 for help.