

When Your Water Breaks: How to Know You're in Labor

It's the day expectant parents have been happily and nervously waiting on for months: your baby's birth! You may have a few false starts before the big day arrives. "False Labor" can feel a lot like the real thing and send you rushing to the hospital. One way to tell it is the real thing: when your water breaks.

For months, your baby has been cushioned and protected by the fluid inside the amniotic sac in your uterus. Amniotic fluid contains nutrients and other substances that help your baby's lungs and digestive system develop. Before or during labor, the membranes of the amniotic sac rupture. This is called the "bag of waters breaking" or "waters breaking."

"If their water breaks, they can either have a large gush of fluid or it's quite literally running down their legs to just a steady wetness, dampness noticed in their underwear, or they need to say I'm not sure what happened, and they need to be either seen by their physician or at the hospital to get evaluated to make sure what's going on."

Call your doctor or midwife if your bag of water broke, or if you aren't sure. They will either recommend monitoring at home or coming into Labor and Delivery. Typically, after your water breaks, labor soon follows. Sometimes, however this is not the case. However, if your labor is delayed, your doctor or midwife may recommend giving you medicine to help start labor because of the risk of infection.

If you think your water has broken, contact your healthcare provider to see how quickly you need to get to the hospital. If water does not break on its own, your healthcare provider may need to break your water during your labor. This is sometimes done to help move your labor forward.

If your water breaks before 37 weeks of pregnancy, this is called preterm premature rupture of membranes or PPRM. Your water breaking early can increase the risk of infection to you and your baby. It can also be dangerous if your baby's lungs are not fully developed.

Call your doctor immediately, if your water breaks preterm. Together you can discuss the best options for you to deliver your baby safely. Your water breaking is the start of the amazing experience of childbirth. Take a deep breath and get ready to meet your baby.