

Your Pregnancy: Signs of Labor

Like every pregnancy, every labor is unique. So what will **your** labor be like?

Learning what happens inside your body can help you get an idea of what to expect during labor.

Whether you feel it or not, your body is getting ready to deliver the baby.
For example, you might feel your baby move lower or settle in your pelvis.

Many weeks before true labor begins, you may have practice contractions called Braxton Hicks.

Contractions are caused by the muscles of the uterus tightening and then relaxing. Practice contractions are usually irregular and will stop if you change positions or rest. But during true labor, contractions help to thin and open the cervix and help to deliver the baby and placenta. At first, the contractions may be mild and irregular.

As labor progresses, they become more intense, closer together, and last longer.
As your labor starts, you could have mild to moderate contractions at first that last 30 to 45 seconds.

They're usually about 5 to 20 minutes apart and may even stop for a while.

This early stage of labor may last for hours, or it may even last a day or more.

Now active labor is another story. It means you should call your doctor or midwife and go to your hospital or birthing center.

You'll know you're in active labor when your contractions are longer, stronger, and happen more often, usually every 2 to 3 minutes. And they'll last for about a minute.

You'll feel your contractions even when you change positions or are walking or moving around.

After a while, you may find it harder to talk during a contraction, so you might have to stop to focus on your breathing.

Just so you know, many people who've delivered a baby say they were surprised by so many of their feelings and a lot of the labor symptoms.

This video can't cover everything you may experience during labor, so trust yourself to ask questions or call for help. Even if you're unsure, let your doctor or midwife know your concerns, and most

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definitely call if something doesn't feel right. In most cases, you'll have time to make choices that are right for you.

Here's a general idea of when to get emergency help. Get help right away if you're having severe vaginal bleeding or having severe pain that doesn't get better between contractions.

Even if you're not due soon, call your doctor or midwife if you've been having more than 6 contractions in an hour or if your baby is moving less than normal. And call if you think your water broke. This can feel like a gush of fluid. And call if you have any vaginal bleeding or spotting.

A lot of things happen inside your body when you go into labor, and that can feel stressful. But many people find it helps to know as much as they can.

Remember, everyone's labor is unique. If you have any questions or concerns as you prepare, you can always call your doctor or midwife.