

Am I in Labor?

Southwest Midwives: 970-247-5543

Family Birthing Center: 970-764-3150

How do I know if I am in labor?

- Great question, often we don't know the answer right away either. If you think you may be in labor, and are more than 37 weeks, stay calm and take a moment to evaluate your symptoms as this is normal and expected.

True vs preparatory ("false") labor:

- Many people will experience contractions prior to being in labor. "False labor" contractions generally have no pattern, do not get stronger or more frequent as time goes on and don't cause cervical dilation. Try resting and drinking water. If your contractions go away, it is probably not real labor yet.

How to time contractions:

- Time contractions from the start of one contraction to the start of the next. If the contractions last less than 30 seconds or are greater than 10 minutes apart, it is likely a sign of "false" labor

Please call if:

- You think you are in labor
- You think you are leaking fluid or are certain your bag of waters broke
- Your baby does not move as much as you think he/she should
- You have a fever or are sick
- You are bleeding like a period
- You think something is wrong
- You just want to talk to a midwife

It is important to stay rested in labor. You may stay at home during the early stages of labor.

Here are some recommended activities:

- Take a nap
- Go for a walk
- Drink water, juice or electrolytes (see our website for laborade recipe)
- Eat healthy protein rich foods and snacks
- Take a shower or bath

When you call, we will likely ask:

- When is your baby due?
- Are you having regular contractions? When did they start?
- Are you leaking any amniotic fluid? If so, what color is it?
- How far are you from the hospital?
- Is this your first baby?
- Have you been staying hydrated?
- Have you been resting?

Deciding when to come to the hospital is a very individual decision. It also depends on if it is your first baby or if you have given birth before and your birthing history. Please talk to the midwives about your personal history when deciding this.

In general, we recommend coming to the hospital when:

- Your contractions are 4-5 minutes apart and regular **if you live less than thirty minutes away**
- Your contractions are 6-8 minutes apart and regular **if you live more than thirty minutes away**

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Great question. Often we don't know the answer right away either. If you think you may be in labor, and are more than 37 weeks pregnant, stay calm and take a moment to evaluate what you're feeling. Remember this is normal and expected.

Stages of Labor

- Early Labor
 - For most people, early labor is the longest stage (anywhere from a few hours to a day) and best spent at home or wherever you're most comfortable.
 - Your contractions may be mild, irregular, or change frequency or intensity depending on your position. You may experience bloody show, which is pink-tinged vaginal discharge as your cervix begins to open.
 - Most people can still talk comfortably or be distracted between or through contractions.
- Active Labor
 - In active labor your cervix begins to change more actively and steadily.
 - Your contractions will begin to get stronger and closer together. They don't usually vary depending on your position and they are so strong you cannot walk or talk during them.
 - In active labor as people move from 8cm to complete dilation, they enter what is called "transition phase." This can include shakiness, nausea/vomiting and a sense of not being able to cope. This phase is usually the fastest part of active labor.
- Pushing
 - Once your cervix has fully opened to 10 cm, your baby starts to descend through the birth canal. You will likely feel rectal pressure and an urge to push.
 - Pushing can take anywhere from 30 minutes to an hour or a few hours with a first baby. It is usually the stage that requires the most active work, focus and determination.. It's important to have stayed rested and hydrated to gather your strength for pushing.
- Birthing the Placenta
 - This usually happens within 15-30 minutes of birthing your baby. The placenta has no bones and is easier than pushing out your baby.

What to do in Early Labor

- It is important to stay rested, hydrated and nourished during early labor.
- Nap, eat healthy, protein-rich snacks, drink water, juice or electrolyte drinks.
- Find ways to distract yourself - go for a walk, take a shower or bath, ask your birth partner for a massage, watch a movie or listen to music.
- Again, nap and rest as much as possible. This is so important.

True vs Preparatory ("False") Labor

- Some women, especially those who have had babies before, will experience contractions prior to going into labor.
- These contractions can feel more intense than Braxton-Hicks contractions (those tightening sensations), but they do not get stronger or more frequent with time, and they do not cause your cervix to change.
- Try drinking water, resting and laying down, or taking a bath. If your contractions go away, it is likely not true labor yet

When to Call In Labor

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After 37 Weeks, Call For:

- **Contractions**
 - If this is your first baby, call if contractions are 4-5 minutes apart lasting 1 minute for the last hour (5-1-1 Rule).
 - Call sooner than 5-1-1 if this is not your first baby OR you live more than thirty minutes away. For example, contractions are 6-8 minutes apart and 30-45 seconds long.
 - Remember, contractions are timed from the start of one contraction to the start of the next contraction.

- **Fluid Leaking**
 - Call if you notice a trickle or gush of fluid, or you're not sure whether your water broke.
 - Take note of whether the fluid is clear or has a green tinge to it. Sometimes baby has a first bowel movement prior to birth (called meconium).

- **Vaginal Bleeding**
 - Call for any bright red bleeding like a period, soaking a pad in less than one hour.

- **Less Fetal Movement**
 - If you feel like your baby is moving less than usual, or you haven't noticed movement in the last few hours, have a snack/drink and lay down. You should feel normal movement. If not, call.

- **Fever/Illness**
 - Call for any temperature over 100.4 degrees F
 - Call if you have vomiting or diarrhea and you cannot keep down any fluids for 12-24 hours

- **Exhaustion**
 - If you've been in early labor for more than 12-24 hours and have not slept or are not coping well, please call. We can review options to get you rest, which can help move your labor forward.

- **Call anytime you think something is wrong, you're not sure what's happening or you just want to talk to a midwife!**