

When to Call

No one can predict when labor will start. One woman can have all the signs that her body is ready to deliver, yet she may not have the baby for weeks. Another woman may have no advance signs before she goes into active labor. First-time deliveries are harder to predict. The following guidelines are to help you decide. In some cases, your doctor will provide individualized instructions. Keep your doctor's office number close by as well as the OB/GYN on call number for after regular office hours.

What is normal?

- Contractions that are irregular are normal at the end of pregnancy
- A mucous plug or bloody show can occur before the onset of true labor

If it is your first baby, call if:

- Your water breaks; or,
- Contractions that are regular:
 - Occurring every five minutes and, lasting approximately 45-60 seconds for 1 hour (for first pregnancies). Occurring every 7-10 minutes for subsequent pregnancies.
 - The contractions should be strong and require effort in coping. This means that you have difficulty walking or having a conversation or performing tasks because of the discomfort.

If you are before 24 weeks, call if you have:

- Bleeding vaginally
- Ruptured membranes or are leaking fluid vaginally
- Temperature of more than 100.6°F that persists
- Abdominal pain that is severe or prolonged
- Persistent vomiting or diarrhea
- Feeling threatened or being harmed either physically or sexually

If you are 24-37 weeks, call if you have:

- More than 4 contractions in a one-hour period
- A decrease in fetal movements from your baby's baseline or less than 10 movements in 2 hours
- Unusual, severe or prolonged headache
- Changes in vision such as blurred or partial vision
- Bleeding vaginally
- Ruptured membranes or leakage of fluid vaginally
- Temperature of more than 100.6°F
- Abdominal pain that is severe or prolonged
- Persistent vomiting or diarrhea
- Feeling threatened or being harmed either physically or sexually

If you are after 37 weeks, call if you have:

- Heavy bleeding which soaks a pad (light bleeding or spotting is normal after vaginal exams)
- Regular painful contractions at five minutes apart which persists for an hour
- Ruptured membranes or leakage of fluid vaginally
- Severe abdominal pain
- A decrease in fetal movement from your baby's baseline, or less than 10 movements in 2 hours
- Unusual, severe or prolonged headache
- Changes in vision such as blurred or partial vision
- Persistent vomiting or diarrhea
- Feeling threatened or being harmed either physically or sexually