

Am I in Labor?

What is labor?

Labor is the work that your uterus does to birth your baby. During labor, your uterus contracts and your cervix (the opening of your uterus) opens (dilation and effacement). You will push your baby out of your uterus through your cervix and into the world.

What do contractions feel like?

When they first start, contractions can feel like cramps during your period. Sometimes you feel pain in your lower back. Most often, contractions feel like muscles pulling painfully in your lower belly. At first, the contractions will probably be 15 to 20 minutes apart. They will not feel very painful. The contractions will get stronger, closer together, and more painful as labor progresses.

How do I time the contractions?

Time your contractions by counting the minutes from the START of one contraction until the START of the next contraction.

What should I do when the contractions start?

If it is night and you can sleep, sleep. If it is daytime, here are some things you can do to take care of yourself at home:

- Walk – if the pains you are having are real labor, walking will make the contractions come faster and harder.
- Take a shower or bath.
- Eat – labor is a big event and takes a lot of energy
- Drink water – if you are in labor, drinking water will help you have strength to get you through your labor
- Rest/nap if you can
- Get a massage.
- Don't panic, you can do this! Your body was made for this.

When should I go to the hospital or call the doctor?

- Your contractions are 5 minutes apart or less for at least one hour
- If several contractions are so painful that you are unable to walk or talk during one
- Your bag of water breaks (you may have a big gush or a slow trickle of water down your leg)
- If you start to bleed like you are having a period
- You have sudden or severe pain
- Your baby has not moved in several hours
- Your water is green or brown in color