

# Preterm Labor

## What is preterm labor?

Preterm labor is when the uterus contracts and the cervix dilates (opens) before 37 weeks gestation. This can cause your baby to be born too early or prematurely.

## What causes preterm labor?

No one really knows. However, there are risk factors that can increase your chances of starting preterm labor:

- Smoking
- Frequent urinary tract infections
- Multiples
- Previous preterm labor/preterm delivery

## Warning signs of preterm labor

- Uterine contractions 15 or fewer minutes apart – these may feel like a painless tightening of your belly
- Cramps that feel like menstrual cramps
- A low, dull backache
- Pelvic pressure
- Abdominal cramping that may feel like a bad case of gas pains. You may have diarrhea.
- An increase or change in vaginal discharge.
- Fluid leaking from the vagina
- A general bad feeling that something is not right

## What do I do if I have warning signs?

- Empty your bladder
- Lie down on your left side and rest
- Drink 3-4 large glasses of water
- Feel for uterine contractions and keep track of how frequently they are coming.

## Call the office if:

- You have vaginal bleeding or fluid leaking from your vagina
- If after an hour of rest and fluids you:
  - Are still having contractions 15 minutes apart or closer (4 or more per hour)
  - Continue to have backache, pressure, or cramping
  - You think anything is wrong
  - You have questions about labor or your pregnancy