

# Signs of Labor

Learn the signs of labor so that you know when to call your doctor and go to the hospital for delivery. If you have any signs of labor before 36 weeks or 9 months of pregnancy, **call your doctor right away**.

The signs of labor are contractions and rupture of membranes.

## Contractions

Contractions occur when the muscles of the uterus tighten and relax as the uterus prepares for delivery.

- **False Labor Contractions**

These often occur during the last month of pregnancy. They:

- ▶ Are irregular.
- ▶ Do not get closer together and may stop after an hour or so.
- ▶ Are not often felt in your back.
- ▶ Stop with walking.
- ▶ Do not get more painful over time.
- ▶ Do not cause the cervix to change.

- **True Labor Contractions**

- ▶ Occur at regular times and last 30 to 60 seconds.
- ▶ Get closer together and more painful over time.
- ▶ May be felt in the lower back and lower abdomen.
- ▶ Continue or increase with walking.
- ▶ Help the cervix to soften, thin, and open for delivery.

- **If you think you are in labor:**

- ▶ Rest, if possible, on your left side.
- ▶ Eat or drink only light foods.

- ▶ Time your contractions with a watch. If one contraction starts at 9:10 and the next starts at 9:16, they are 6 minutes apart.
- ▶ Call your doctor, clinic or hospital when contractions are:
  - 5 minutes apart for 2 hours for the first pregnancy
  - 5 minutes apart for 1 hour for other pregnancies
  - As directed by your doctor or clinic

## **Rupture of Membranes**

Rupture of membranes, called water break, is the trickle or gush of fluid from the vagina after the bag of fluid around the baby breaks. The fluid is often clear, but it may be white or green. The bag of water can break at any time. It may break before you feel any contractions and may leak during a contraction.

- If you think your water has broken, call your doctor and go to the hospital.
- Do not take a bath or put anything into your vagina.
- You may wear a pad.

**Talk to your doctor or nurse if you have any questions or concerns.**