



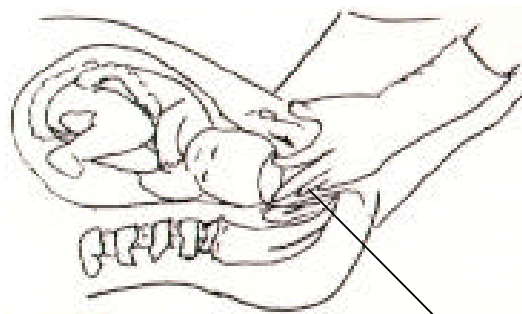
How Will I Know When I Am In Labor?

Contractions

Contractions are often felt as a “tightening” around the baby or like the baby is “balling up.” They may also feel like menstrual cramps, but as time passes, the “contractions” usually get closer together, last longer, and become more painful. The top of the uterus tightens and feels hard, then the contraction spreads down the uterus as it pulls open the cervix at the bottom of the uterus.

Before your cervix can stretch to open around the baby’s head, it has to become shorter and thinner. This shortening and thinning is called effacement and is measured in percentages, from 0 to 100%.

The process of the cervix opening, so that your baby’s head can pass through, is called dilatation or dilation. It is measured in centimeters from 1 to 10 centimeters.



Cervix

Timing Contractions

Contractions are timed from the beginning of one contraction to the beginning of the next one. The time between contractions is called the frequency or interval. This tells how far apart the contractions are.

The time when you first feel the tightness or pain until it softens and has gone, is called the duration or length of the contraction.

Suppose a contraction starts at 7:00 PM and is hard and tight for 60 seconds and then diminishes. The next contraction starts to tighten at 7:10 PM and lasts 50 seconds. These contractions are 10 minutes apart, lasting 50-60 seconds. You should time contractions for an hour to determine how far apart they are.



You Can Tell You Are In Labor If:

- You have regular contractions. They may be irregular at first, but usually become closer, longer and stronger as time passes.
- Your contractions build to a peak, then ease off. This usually is more definite as labor progresses.
- You have a “bloody show” (bloody mucus) WITH contractions.
- An activity change (example: walking or warm shower) makes contractions stronger.
- Lying down does not make the contractions go away.
- Your water breaks (also called rupturing of the membranes).



Rupture Of The Membranes

The membranes may rupture at any time before or during labor. The tear may be low near the cervix, and the uncontrollable gush of fluid is a definite sign that the sac has broken.

Another kind of tear occurs higher in the sac. Instead of a gush, you might notice only a trickle of fluid. If you empty your bladder and still notice leaking, it may be your amniotic fluid. If in doubt, you should contact our physician.