



Preterm Labor

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What is Preterm Labor?

- Preterm labor [PTL] is labor that begins before the end of 37 weeks of pregnancy and it can lead to a preterm birth. A full term pregnancy is 40 weeks.
- About 1 in 10 babies born in the U.S. are born preterm.
- A preterm baby may need to stay in the hospital long after the mother goes home.



Why the Concern ?

- Preterm births account for about 75% of newborn deaths which are not related to birth defects.
- Preterm babies “preemies” tend to grow slowly. They may have trouble with their vision, hearing, breathing and nervous system. They may also have learning disabilities or behavior problems later in life.

Am I at Risk for Preterm Birth ?

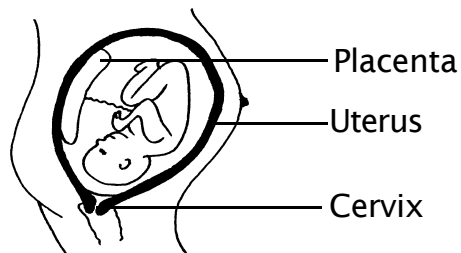
You are at a higher risk of having a preterm labor if you...

- Have warning signs of PTL.
- Had PTL during this pregnancy.
- Had PTL or a preterm birth in a previous pregnancy.
- Are carrying more than one baby.
- Had one or more second trimester induced pregnancy terminations.
- Have an abnormal cervix (e.g. due to surgery).
- Have an abnormal uterus.
- Abdominal surgery during this pregnancy.
- Have had a serious infection while pregnant.
- Have had bleeding in the second or third trimester of your pregnancy.
- Are underweight or weigh less than 100 lbs.
- Were exposed to DES (diethylstilbestrol, a drug given to many pregnant women in the 1950s and 1960s) as a fetus.
- Smoke or use cocaine.
- Have had little or no prenatal care.

Warning Signs of PTL.

Preterm labor is usually not painful, but there are several warning signs you should be aware of...

- **Vaginal discharge**
 - Change in type (watery or mucous)
 - Increase in amount
- **Vaginal bleeding**
- **Ruptured membranes**
- **Pelvic or lower abdominal pressure**
- **Constant, low, dull backache**
- **Abdominal cramps with or without loose bowel movements**
- **Regular contractions or uterine tightening, often painless**



What Are Uterine Contractions ?

- When a muscle in your body, such as the uterus, contracts it becomes tight (hard) to the touch. Uterine contractions produce this “hardness”. Many women describe the contraction as feeling like the baby is “balling up”.
- It is normal to experience contractions at times during pregnancy e.g. when you first lie down, after sex or after you walk up or down stairs. These are usually referred to as “*Braxton Hicks*” contractions.

What Should I Do If I Think the Contractions are Regular?

- Lie down on your side for at least one hour.
- Drink 3 to 4 glasses of water during this hour.
- Place your fingertips on your uterus and feel the contractions.
- Measure the time it takes between the start of one contraction to the next.

CALL RIGHT AWAY IF YOU HAVE ...

- Any fluid from your vagina.
- Vaginal bleeding.
- A sudden increase in vaginal discharge.
- Five or more contractions in one hour.