



Preterm Labor-Reference Guide

What Is Preterm Labor?

- *Labor that begins before 37 weeks of pregnancy.

Who Has The Greatest Risk Of Preterm Labor?

- *Previous preterm labor or delivery
- *Current multiple pregnancy-twins, triplets, etc.
- *Two or more abortions or miscarriages
- *Abnormalities of the cervix, (such as incompetent cervix)
- *Abnormalities of the uterus (such as a malformation or fibroids)
- *Severe kidney or urinary tract infections
- *Acute infection in the mother
- *Bleeding problems with the current pregnancy
- *Abdominal surgery during the current pregnancy
- *Maternal weight less than 100 pounds

What Are The Warning Signs Of Preterm Labor?

- *Contractions, tightening, or a hardening feeling-6 or more times per hour
- *Menstrual-like cramps
- *Pelvic pressure or fullness in pelvic area, back or thighs
- *Dull ache in the lower back
- *Vaginal discharge (change in type or amount)
- *Abdominal cramps with or without diarrhea
- *A general feeling that something is "not quite right"
- *Bleeding

REMEMBER: PRETERM CONTRACTIONS ARE OFTEN PAINLESS

Detection Of Preterm Labor

Early detection of the signs and symptoms of preterm labor may be the key factors in preventing a premature birth.

For some women the health care provider may prescribe the use of self palpation for the detection of uterine activity, which may indicate the onset of preterm labor and the need for evaluation. It is important to become familiar with your normal uterine activity. Once you know what is normal for you, you will be able to focus on what is abnormal.

Performing Self-Palpation

- *If you are having contractions,...lie down...
- *Lie down with a pillow behind your back so you are tilted on your left side.(Do not lie on your back.)
- *Drink 2 to 3 glasses of water.

*Place your fingertips on your uterus, if your uterus is tightening and then relaxing, you can tell how often these contractions are occurring. "How often" is the time between the start of one tightening and the start of the next tightening.

*If you notice contractions while you are monitoring, turn on your left side and continue to monitor for an hour. If your contractions are occurring more than once every 15 minutes (6 or more per hour), you need to call your health care provider right away.

Some Tips About Contractions

*When any muscle in your body contracts, it becomes tight and hard to the touch.

*When your uterus (which is a muscle) contracts, you will feel it tighten or harden.

*When the contraction stops, your uterus becomes soft.

*It is normal for your uterus to contract at times during your pregnancy. This may happen when you first lie down, after sex, or after you walk up and down stairs.

*It is not normal to have frequent or continuous uterine contractions before your baby is due.

What Is Normal?

*Contractions-six or less per hour

*Backache as your baby grows and causes your posture to alter

*Pressure as your baby grows and presses on your pubic bone and your legs

*Pulling and stretching of muscles that may cause pain in a specific area

What Is Abnormal?

*Regular uterine contractions or tightening 6 or more per hour

*Rhythmic lower abdominal cramping

*A low, dull backache that feels different from what you normally experience

*Persistent diarrhea or intestinal cramps

*An unusual rhythmic or persistent pelvic pressure

*A large amount of mucus or water leaking from the vagina

*A change in color of vaginal discharge to pink or brown

*Bleeding

Medication To Stop And/Or Suppress Labor

*Medication may be prescribed for you after you have had signs of preterm labor. As with all drugs, you may experience some side effects.

Common Side Effects

*Fast heart beat or pulse (usually 90-110)

*Shaky feeling

*Nausea

*Constipation

*Feeling overheated

*Headache

*Anxiety

More Serious Side Effects

*Shortness of breath or cough

*Chest pain or pressure

*Heart rate above 120 or "irregular" heartbeat

*Intense headache

NOTE: CONTACT YOUR HEALTH CARE PROVIDER IMMEDIATELY FOR ANY OF THESE SYMPTOMS.