



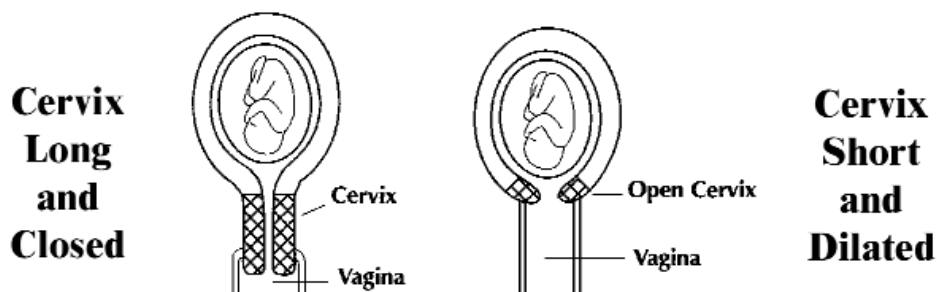
What Is Labor?

When the time comes for the birth of your baby, it can be both exciting and a bit scary.

- Your baby grows and develops inside of you in your uterus.
 - Your cervix is the lower part of the neck of the uterus.
 - Your cervix opens into your vagina.
 - When your baby is ready to be born, your uterus begins to tighten in a regular pattern (contractions).
 - This causes the cervix to open.
- The baby is pushed into the vagina or birth canal.
 - This is called labor.
 - Labor usually last about 14 hours for a 1st time mother.
 - If this is your 2nd or 3rd child, labor may only last 8 hours.

You will use a lot of energy during this time.

- The contractions you will have during this time are painful. They are called labor pains.
- The actual birth of the baby is called delivery.



Signs That Labor Is Near

There are signs to let you know that labor will begin soon.

- You will feel a lightening feeling about 2 to 3 weeks before your baby is born.
- This happens because your baby is now in the lower part of your pelvis.

- People sometimes say, “the baby dropped” when they talk about lightening.
- You will now be able to breathe a little easier.
- You may notice leg cramps or pains because of pressure on the nerves that pass through the pelvis.
- You may feel more pressure on your bladder (more trips to the bathroom).
- You may have more pelvic pressure.
- You may have more swelling of the feet and ankles when you are on your feet too long.

Effacement: Thinning and shortening of the cervix as labor progresses.

- You may have more vaginal secretions.
 - A few days before your labor begins, the cervix becomes even softer.
 - It begins to open a little.
 - It may also shorten (efface).
- You will hear your doctor use the word, efface. He will be talking about how your cervix is getting ready to begin labor (for example, the doctor may say you are 20% effaced).
- As your cervix softens, shortens, and starts to open, you may see a little pinkish discharge from your vagina.
- This is normal and usually happens 24 to 48 hours before labor starts.
 - You may have a sudden burst of energy 24 to 48 hours before labor.
 - It is important to save this extra energy because you will need your energy to get through labor.
- Your water may break before labor starts.
 - This can be a sudden gush or a slow trickle of fluid.
 - The fluid should be clear and odorless.
 - Labor usually begins within 24 hours after your water breaks.
 - If labor does not begin within 12 hours and you are near your due date, the doctor may want to help you start labor.
- When you are in labor, the contractions are regular.
 - They get closer together.
 - They get stronger.
 - They last longer.
 - Usually the pain starts at the back and moves around to the front of your abdomen.
 - When you walk around the pain does not get better.
 - Walking around may make the contractions feel stronger.

Emergency Situations

CALL YOUR DOCTOR RIGHT AWAY AND GO TO THE HOSPITAL if you notice any of the following signs:

BLEEDING

- If you have any vaginal bleeding, call your doctor.
- CALL 911 if you have a large gush or a steady stream of bright red blood.
- This is an emergency.
- Get help.
- Lie on your side and put your feet higher than your head.
- Save the pads or cloths used to catch the blood.

RUPTURE OF THE BAG OF WATER

- Your water may break to tell you labor is starting.
- Sometimes this may happen too early.
- Call your doctor if you notice a gush of fluid or a steady trickle of fluid.
 - Save pads or cloths and bring them with you to the hospital.
 - Tell the doctor about any odor.

SEVERE STOMACH PAIN

Call your doctor if you have constant, severe pain (with or without contractions) that does not go away when you change position.

**... AND ANY OTHER SPECIFIC SITUATIONS
YOUR DOCTOR TELLS YOU TO WATCH FOR.**

False Labor

False labor contractions do not cause the cervix to thin out or open up.

- They are irregular.
- They do not get closer together.
- They do not get stronger or last any longer.
- Walking around or a change in activity or position usually relieves the pain.
- True labor is diagnosed when both uterine contractions and cervical change occur.
- Sometimes the only way to tell if labor is true or false is to have the doctor check for changes in your cervix during a vaginal exam.

Tips to Prepare for Labor

- **Ask your doctor when your baby is due.**
 - Every delivery occurring beyond the 37th week is considered full term.
- **Ask your doctor to tell you when you should call, no matter what time of day or night it is.**
 - For example, your water breaks, vaginal bleeding, severe pain, etc.
- **Ask your doctor at what point you should call when you are in labor.**
 - For example, when contractions are regular and 10 minutes apart, when contractions are 5 minutes apart, etc.
- **During your last month of pregnancy when vaginal exams are done at regular office visits, ask your doctor to tell you what changes in the cervix were seen.**
- **Attend a childbirth education class.**
- **Understand that false labor is common and the doctor cannot tell the difference from true labor except by a vaginal exam.**
 - Never feel foolish if you have an extra office exam or visit to the hospital labor room to determine if your labor is true labor.
- **Learn the admission procedures for your hospital and where to go when you are in labor.**
 - You can usually preregister with most hospitals so you don't have to worry on the day of your delivery.
- **Make a trial run to the hospital.**
 - Find out how long it will take to get there and what is the best route.
 - Will there be more traffic during different times of the day?
- **Have your bags packed and ready to go at any time.**
 - Bring your camera, video recorder, and anything special you have planned for your baby's arrival.

Your doctor can answer any of your questions about your pregnancy.

- Read any written materials that the doctor gives you.
- Between office visits, write down any questions you have for your doctor.
- Bring your list with you each time you go to see the doctor.