

Labor Signs

Every woman begins labor in her own way. Not everyone experiences all the signs of early labor, and when they are there they appear in a different order for every woman.

Warm-up:

The things on this list are signs that your body is getting ready to go into labor. It may be hours, days, or even weeks before you move from this point into early labor, though they are still great signs of your body's preparation and readiness. Mention these to your midwife at your next appointment!

- **Contractions:** When your labor is warming up, your uterus may feel firm or tight with contractions, but not painful. At this stage they are intermittent and not in any particular pattern, and they may come and go according to your activity level and how much water you've been drinking.
- **Dropping or lightening:** You may feel that your baby has descended further into your pelvis, and it may cause some stretching or cramping sensations. You may need to urinate more often, and may feel that you can breathe more freely. For second time moms, this may not happen until labor.
- **Mucous plug:** The mucous plug is located in your cervix, and it creates a protective barrier between your vagina and your uterus. When your cervix begins to thin and open, the mucous plug is released. Sometimes the mucous plug is obvious, other times it comes out in small bits and is not as easy to identify.
- **Mood:** Some women get very moody or emotional in the days preceding labor. You may not feel like leaving the house, or feel like nesting.
- **Backache:** You may have a crampy, achy feeling in your lower back.
- **Diarrhea:** You may have diarrhea before the onset of labor.

Early labor:

The following signs may indicate that you are in early labor. It's a good idea to let your midwives know if you are experiencing any of these signs.

- **Bloody show:** Similar to the mucous plug, but mixed with pink, red, or brown blood.
- **Contractions:** These sensations may feel achy, crampy, or sharp, and may feel similar to menstrual cramps. You may also feel the contractions in your lower back and thighs. You will probably be able to keep talking through them, though you may have to focus and breathe through them. In early labor, contractions may go away or "back-off" if you change position, get in the shower, or fall asleep.

Active labor:

- **Contractions:** In active labor, contractions get longer, stronger, and closer together. For most people they are intense, and require full attention. When timing them, they are usually less than five minutes from start of one to start of the next contraction, and last 60 seconds or more. Most women choose to move around and have a hard time just breathing through the contractions without making sounds.

The following signs may indicate that the **birth is imminent**. Call your midwife right away! If you get her voicemail, call the other midwives on your team.

- **Pushing urge:** A pushing urge or even involuntary bearing down with contractions usually indicates you are about to have your baby. Rarely, a woman may have this urge early in her labor, but if you are feeling it you should call your midwife right away.
- **Contractions:** Contractions that are extremely close together (1-2 minutes apart) and lasting 60 seconds or more may indicate transition into the pushing phase of labor.

Danger signs:

- Vaginal bleeding (other than bloody show).
- Severe abdominal or pelvic pain.
- Severe headache, blurry vision or pain under the ribcage.
- Fetal movements have stopped completely, or are greatly reduced from normal movement patterns.