**What is Labour?**

Labour is the process the uterus goes through to give birth to a baby. For several hours the uterus will alternate between contracting and resting in order to thin the opening of the uterus (efface) and then open (dilate).The uterus will continue this process until it has reached 10 cm in dilation; once this occurs, the contractions will aid in pushing the baby down the birth canal.

**Signs of Labour**

There are many signs of labour that are normal, natural and nothing to be concerned about. They are as follows:

1. Lightening

As you get closer to the end of your pregnancy, the baby will begin to move downwards. When this happens, breathing can be easier, and you will feel less burning in your chest/throat after eating. You will also have to pass urine more often. For a first pregnancy, this may happen several weeks before you go into labour; if this is not your first pregnancy, it can happen closer to giving birth.

1. Mucous Plug

During pregnancy, a thick mucous plug develops in the cervix. As the cervix begin to thin and open, this plug may come out.

1. Bloody Show

During labour, or a few days before labour, you may notice a pink, red, or brown discharge. This is a sign that your cervix is changing shape and the mucous plug coming out. Tell your health care provided if/when this occurs.

1. Water Breaking

Inside your uterus, there is a bag of fluid called the amniotic sac that the baby is inside of. When a baby is ready to be born, it is normal for this sac to break and for the liquid to be expelled from the vagina. When this happens , there are 5 things to remember:

* Write down the time of your water breaking.
* Make note of the color of the liquid (it should be clear).
* Make note of the smell if the liquid (it should not smell).
* Do not use a tampon, use a pad or a towel as needed.
* Call your health care provider or go to the hospital following your water breaking.

1. Contractions

Towards the end of your pregnancy, you may have contractions that come and go. This is the process of the uterus getting reading for the birthing process and are called pre-labour contractions, or Braxton-Hicks contractions.

There are several differences between pre-labour contractions or true contractions discussed further on the next page.

**Pre-labour Contractions vs True Labour Contractions**

Pre-labour Contractions:

* Do not get stronger
* Do not ger regular
* Go away with walking
* Feel strongest in the front
* There is no bloody show
* Tend to go away with rest

True Labour Contractions

* Get stronger
* Become regular and close together
* Get stronger when walking
* May begin in the back and move to the front
* Bloody show is usually present

**Timing Contractions**

Timing contractions is an important tool for understanding your labour. By timing contractions, you can track the frequency, length and intensity and confirm that your are in true labour. It can be helpful to use a table to track the following:

1. When each contraction begins and ends
2. How far apart the contractions are
3. How long each contraction lasts
4. How strong the contractions feel

**Stages of Labour**

There are four stages of labour:

1. Labour

This is when your contractions will get stronger, happen more often, and last longer. By the end of this stage, your cervix will be 10 cm dilated and the baby will move down the pelvis.

1. Birth of Baby

Contractions will intensify, and you will feel the need to push. Through the combined work of the contractions and your pushing, your baby will be born.

1. Release of Placenta

Following the birth of your baby, you will begin feeling mild contractions again. At this time, you can push out the placenta, this is usually a quick process. However, if the placenta does not come out on its own, you may need help from your health care provider.

1. Recovery

In this stage, you will be resting after the birth of the baby. When spending time with you baby, skin-to-skin contact can help you bond with your baby and also keep them warm. This is also a good time to try breast feeding.

**Sexual Health Questions? We have Answers!**

**Location:**

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**Stages of Labour**