

Preterm Labour

What is preterm labour?

- Regular contractions that open your cervix before 37 weeks of pregnancy.
- Babies born before 37 weeks of pregnancy are considered premature.
- Approximately 7% of all pregnancies will result in a preterm birth. Only 1-2% will deliver before 34 weeks.

Who is at risk of preterm labour?

We cannot always predict who will have preterm labour, but if there are increased risk factors in your pregnancy, your midwife will let you know during a prenatal appointment. There is a higher chance if you:

- had a previous preterm delivery
- had assistance to get pregnant – eg in vitro fertilization
- are younger than 18 or older than 35
- were underweight before pregnancy or have not gained much weight in pregnancy
- have vaginal bleeding or your water breaks
- smoke, drink alcohol or use cocaine during pregnancy
- have frequent urinary tract infections that are not treated.

Page your midwife if you:

- **Suspect your water has broken**
When your water breaks, you will notice watery fluid coming out of your vagina. This may be a large sudden gush of fluid, or a slower trickle of fluid. It may completely wet your underwear and pants. Once your water is broken, your body continues to make more fluid, so you will continue to have small leaks as you or your baby move. Usually, you will need to wear a pad and it will regularly need to be changed as the fluid continues to trickle out. Sometimes increased vaginal discharge of pregnancy will be mistaken for your water breaking. If you are uncertain if your water has broken, page your midwife.
- **Have vaginal bleeding or spotting, including red, pink or brown blood**
Some spotting can be normal in pregnancy and it does not always mean that you are in preterm labour. Your midwife will ask you questions about the amount of bleeding and any other symptoms. Keep your underwear or pad with the blood on it in a plastic bag in case your midwife wants to see it.
- **Have lower abdominal pain, menstrual-like cramping or lower back pain that comes and goes**
Contractions in labour will become stronger, longer and closer together. It is normal in pregnancy to experience occasional random mild cramping. In preterm labour, the cramping will often form a pattern. If this happens and you have not reached 37 weeks in your pregnancy, page your midwife.