

Recognizing Labor

Understanding the signs your body is preparing for birth

Timing Contractions

Frequency: Time from the start of one contraction to the start of the next.

Duration: How long each contraction lasts.

Intensity: How strong the contraction feels.

Early (Latent) Labor

Typical cervical change: 0–6 cm

- 30–60 second contractions
- Often 5–20 minutes apart
- Able to talk through many contractions
- Rest, hydrate, eat, and conserve energy.

Active Labor

Typical cervical change: 6–10 cm

- 45–90 second contractions
- Often 2–5 minutes apart
- Stronger, longer, more regular
- Position changes, hydrotherapy, breathing, and continuous support can help.

True Labor	Prodromal Labor
Becomes stronger	Often stays about the same
Gets closer together	May remain irregular
Continues despite rest	May lessen with rest
Usually causes cervical change	Often little cervical change
Walking may strengthen contractions	Walking often doesn't change them

Signs Labor May Be Starting

- Bloody show
- Increasing contractions
- Cervical dilation and effacement
- Baby descending into the pelvis
- Water breaking before or during labor

When to Contact Your Provider

Call your provider if your water breaks, contractions become regular and increasingly intense, you notice decreased fetal movement, heavy bleeding, severe headache, vision changes, chest pain, severe abdominal pain, or you have any concerns.

Every labor is different. The overall pattern of contractions and cervical change is usually more helpful than any single timing rule.