

## Preterm Labor

Labor is called “preterm” when it occurs more than three weeks prior to your due date. Complications from early deliveries are generally more severe the earlier one delivers. For this reason, it is essential that you learn to identify possible signs of preterm labor.

Your practitioner has probably already discussed this with you if you are at a particularly high risk of having preterm labor. However, some women have preterm labor without prior risk.

The onset of preterm labor maybe very subtle and difficult to recognize. Usually it is not painful. Symptoms include some or all of the following:

1. Regular tightening of the uterus as often as every 15 minutes.
2. Menstrual-like cramps, either rhythmic or continuous that may radiate to the back.
3. Low dull backache, different from other back pain and not related to exercise or exertion.
4. Pubic or pelvic pressure that is not relieved by urinating or laying down.
5. Symptoms consistent with a bladder infection including urinary frequency, urgency or burning.
6. Heavy blood-tinged mucous discharge from the vagina.

“Normal” pregnancy symptoms are similar to many of the above but occur in a slightly different manner. Symptoms include some or all of the following:

1. Contractions or tightening of the uterus which are usually irregular and self-limiting.
2. Low back pain that usually occurs after standing long hours or after exercising which is relieved by rest.
3. Pubic or pelvic pressure from the baby pressing down which is usually relieved by laying down on either side, preferably the left side.
4. Localized pain that may be caused by pulling or stretching of individual muscles and ligaments.

Most importantly, you know what is normal for you. If you feel that something is “wrong” don’t hesitate to contact us. Early diagnosis of preterm labor prevents many preterm deliveries. Together we can decrease your chances of preterm delivery by early recognition and prompt treatment of preterm labor.