

NOVA GROUP FOR WOMEN

HOW TO TELL WHEN LABOR BEGINS

It is a rare patient having her first baby whose labor is so fast that she doesn't make it to the hospital. Rather, the patient usually thinks she is in labor when labor hasn't actually begun. Labor is defined as contractions along with cervical dilation. Many times, the baby's head is settling into the pelvis near the due date, contractions begin which frequently subside rather than progress to true labor. It is rarely as dramatic in its onset as is seen in films.

The following points are made for your guidance:

First, bloody show is relatively unimportant. It is usually caused by the baby's head settling and when it presses against the cervix it frequently breaks open some blood vessels. It can mean that the onset of labor is imminent but certainly not necessarily so. Also, there can be a great deal of bloody show almost as much as a period. If bleeding occurs with or without contractions to the extent of a period or more, let us know. Otherwise, as mentioned above, bloody show is unimportant.

We would like to know if your water has broken. This may vary from a small leakage of fluid to a sudden gush. Most people will go into labor within 12 hours after their water breaks. Sometimes people start contracting almost immediately but other times there is a lull period of a number of hours. Therefore, let us know if you think your water has broken, so that we may decide what course of action should be taken.

The most important development is the occurrence of regular contractions. Any time contractions are further apart than 10 minutes apart, they may stop. If you should have a few contractions at 3-4 minute intervals and then bounce back to every 10-20 minutes this is obviously not true labor. Hence, we feel you should have painful contractions in the 3-5 minute range for at least two hours if this is your first pregnancy before you need to contact us. With your subsequent pregnancies, please contact us after you have had regular strong contractions at 5-6 minute intervals for one hour. Even if you are some distance from the hospital there should be plenty of time. Contractions generally will be occurring at 2-3 minute intervals for at least several hours before delivery occurs. We will be doing pelvic examinations near your due date and if we feel this plan should be modified on the basis of the examination, we will let you know at the office visit.

If for some reason our phone (703) 560-1611, which is answered all the time, should not be working our answering service number is (703)476-3606. Call us FIRST, do not go to the hospital. If it is during normal office hours, we will probably have you come to the office to be checked before going to the hospital to determine if it is actual labor. When pelvic exams are done in late pregnancy they might cause some bloody show or contractions shortly after the exam. If this should happen during the day of the exam, it probably means nothing and could be ignored. If it starts the next day, it may be labor trying to start and have nothing to do with the exam.