

PRETERM LABOR

Preterm labor (PTL) is regular uterine contractions that cause cervical change before 37 completed weeks of pregnancy. It affects 10-20% of all pregnancies. While there are factors that place some women at higher risk for PTL, many women who have no identifiable risk factors will still have PTL. Therefore, it is important that all pregnant women are taught the signs and symptoms to watch for, and to know what to do if they think they are having preterm contractions.

Risk Factors for PTL:

- Teen pregnancy or maternal age over 40
- Low pre-pregnancy weight
- Multiple gestation
- Previous pregnancy with preterm labor, or previous preterm delivery
- One or more second trimester miscarriages
- Smoking
- Drug use (especially cocaine use)
- Abnormalities in the shape of formation of the uterus
- Fibroids
- Cervical incompetence
- Certain cervical infections
- Uterine infection

Warning Signs of PTL

- Uterine contractions or tightenings occurring more than 4-5 times in an hour
- Menstrual like cramping usually felt low in the abdomen and may be constant or come and go
- Persistent dull low back pain not improved by rest or position changes. This may radiate to the abdomen and may come and go regularly
- A significant increase in pelvic pressure
- Increase or change in vaginal discharge
- Vaginal bleeding
- A general feeling of discomfort or that something is “just not right”

What To Do

If you feel you are experiencing the symptoms related to preterm labor, you should get off your feet, lay on your left side, and drink several large glasses of clear liquids (water, juice, etc.). Many times increased contractions that are NOT preterm labor are associated with too much activity or dehydration. Other things that are frequently associated with contractions are bladder infections and gastroenteritis (diarrhea).

If, after resting for an hour, your symptoms persist, call your providers office. If it is night or on the weekend, the answering service will have the on call provider call you back. If you are not sure about the symptoms you are having, please call.

If you think that your membranes have ruptured (broken bag of water), or you have bleeding, call right away.