

Moving Through Early Labor



How to Recognize Early Labor

Recognizing the different signs of labor can be helpful in determining when to go to the hospital. While no two pregnancies or labor experiences are the same, there are two distinct phases of labor: early and active. For most women, early labor is the longest part of labor and can last up to 20 hours.



Tips for Early Labor

Staying at home during early labor gives you the opportunity to rest and hydrate. It also increases your chances of a vaginal delivery. Your health care provider will recommend when you should go to the hospital based on your health history.

If you are in early labor, these tips can help you stay comfortable at home:

- Drink plenty of fluids
- Eat a light snack, such as chicken broth, toast, cheese or fruit
- Use relaxation and breathing techniques
- Take a warm shower or bath
- Listen to music
- Have your support person provide a gentle massage or give positive affirmations

Labor Circuit

At Sharp HealthCare, we believe in empowering patients to actively manage their comfort during labor. We created this labor circuit to help provide comfort during contractions, as well as help balance your body and baby for labor progression.

Listen to your body and do what feels best for you. We recommend doing the circuit in this order:

1. Start with the Side-Lying Release
2. Next, choose one of these positions:
 - Psoas Muscle Stretch
 - Squats
 - Forward Lunge
3. Then, do the Abdominal Lift and Tuck
4. Finish with one of these positions:
 - Birthing Ball
 - Hands and Knees
 - Hip Dip



Side-Lying Release

1. Lie on your side on the edge of a bed or couch so your belly hangs off. Rest your head on a pillow. Have a support person stand in front of your belly and support your weight by positioning their hands on top of your hips to keep them aligned.
2. Lift your top leg with your toes pointed toward the ceiling, then gently drop it straight out in front of you. Aim for your top leg to make a 90-degree angle with your bottom leg, or as close as you can get without straining.
3. Continue lowering your leg, using gravity to stretch. Keep your shoulders and hips stacked straight, trying not to lean forward or backward.
4. Remain in this position for 3 contractions or up to 10 minutes. In between contractions, your support person can gently rock your hips back and forth.
5. Do this stretch on your other side. This stretch can be repeated every 4 hours.



Psoas Muscle Stretch

1. Lie on your back on the edge of a bed.
2. Place a pillow underneath your hips.
3. Allow your legs to hang off the bed and place your feet on the ground.
4. Fold one leg toward your chest and place your hands around your knee.
5. Repeat this stretch on your other leg.



Squats

1. Stand while holding onto a stable chair or bed in front of you, with feet hip-width apart.
2. Gently bend your knees and then rise again.
3. As you move, rotate your hips in different directions to feel a gentle stretch.



Forward Lunge

1. While kneeling on a towel or pillow, step one foot in front of you.
2. Shift your weight forward, gently stretching your hips.
3. Return to the starting position.
4. Repeat with your other leg.



Abdominal Lift and Tuck

Do this exercise when a contraction starts.

1. Stand straight with your back against a wall or in front of your support person.
2. Lift your belly 2 inches and tuck your hips by flattening your back.
3. Gently bend your knees and hold this position for the entire contraction.
4. When the contraction ends, lean slightly forward and lower your belly back down.
5. Repeat this exercise for 10 contractions.



Birthing Ball

Do this exercise when a contraction starts.

1. Sit on a large yoga ball with your knees wide.
2. Gently move your hips while sitting on top of the yoga ball. Keep your hips uneven.





Hands and Knees

1. Kneel on the floor and lean forward onto your hands or forearms. You can use a towel or pillows under your knees for comfort.
2. Gently rock your hips and stretch forward, or alternate between tilting your pelvis back and arching your spine.



Hip Dip

1. Sit on a yoga ball or stand with knees slightly bent.
2. Move your hips in a slow, smooth figure-8 motion by lifting one side and rolling it forward while dropping the other side as it rolls back.
3. Repeat this about 8 times.

Types of Contractions

As you get closer to your due date, it can be hard to tell when labor actually starts. Compare these signs to know when true labor starts.

True Labor vs. False Labor

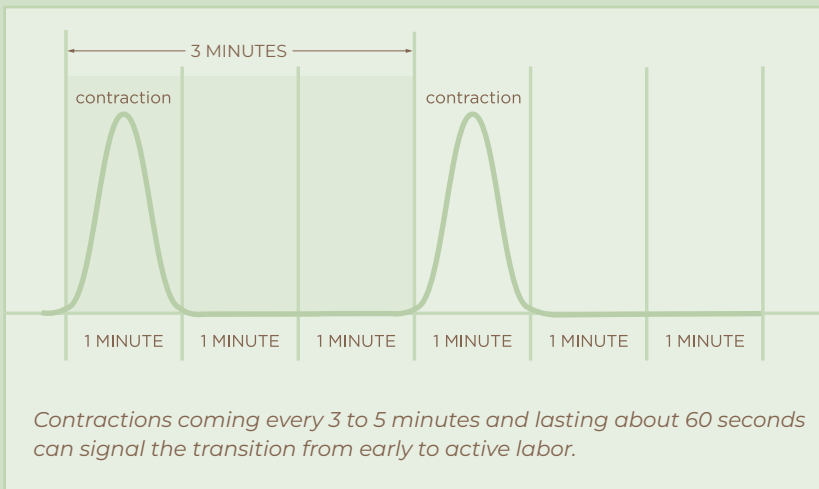
TRUE LABOR CONTRACTIONS	FALSE LABOR CONTRACTIONS
Contractions occur at regular intervals	Contractions occur at irregular intervals
Strength and length of contractions increase	Strength and length of contractions are relatively unchanged
Time between contractions shortens	Time between contractions does not shorten
Pain increases and does not ease with walking	Pain can be relieved with walking or rest
Cervix dilates	Cervix does not dilate

When to Go to the Hospital

Use the following information to help determine when to go to the hospital and what to report to your health care provider.

Contractions Intensify

Contractions often begin as mild and somewhat irregular, but will grow stronger, closer together and in a more consistent pattern.



We recommend measuring your contractions for 1 to 2 hours when you first notice them. Measure contractions from the start of one to the start of the next.

When you have regular, painful contractions that last about 60 seconds each and occur at least every 3 to 5 minutes for more than 2 hours, it may be time to go to the hospital. However, please follow your health care provider's recommendations.

Water Breaks

If you think your water may have broken, it's important to note the time and color of the fluid. Regardless of whether you have contractions, go to the hospital.

Vaginal Bleeding

If you are experiencing vaginal bleeding that is like a period or soaking a maxi pad in less than 1 hour, go directly to the hospital. The following situations are normal during pregnancy:

- **Mucus plug** — It is common to have pink or blood-tinged vaginal discharge when you lose your mucus plug, which can happen days before labor.
- **Cervical exams** — A small amount of vaginal bleeding is normal for 1 to 2 days following a vaginal exam.
- **Intercourse** — Spotting after intercourse is normal.

Decreased Fetal Movement

If you notice a decrease in your baby's movements or if you are unable to meet the fetal movement count guidelines given to you by your health care provider, it may indicate your baby needs further evaluation.

Go to the Triage Department at the hospital immediately.

Evaluation at the Hospital

When you arrive at the hospital, we will evaluate you, your baby and your labor progression to determine if you need to be admitted. It is very common to mistake the signs of early labor for active labor.

If you are sent home, be sure to continue timing your contractions and monitoring your fetal movement counts, and keep all scheduled prenatal appointments.

If you are unsure of whether you should go to the hospital, contact your health care provider.

If you are unable to reach your health care provider, go directly to the hospital.

For more resources on childbirth and newborns,
visit sharp.com/maternity.

