

What is Preterm Labor?

Preterm Labor is labor that begins before the end of 36 weeks of pregnancy. It happens when the uterus tightens and makes the cervix open. The baby can be delivered too soon. Babies born too early risk major illness and may not even survive. Babies born before 37 weeks are considered premature.

Many of these newborns will require special care in the Newborn Intensive Care Unit (NICU).

What does Preterm Labor feel like?

Learn to recognize these signs of preterm labor to protect yourself and your baby:

- **Contractions**-Tightening of the uterus with or without cramping.
- **Low, Dull Backache**-You may feel backache, below your waistline. It may come and go, or it may be constant.
- **Stomach cramps**-You may or may not experience diarrhea or loose stools.
- **Pressure**-the baby may feel heavy or as if it is pushing down low in your pelvis. The pressure might come and go.
- **Leaking or gushing fluid**-If your “water breaks”, you will feel a continuous or intermittent flow of fluid from the vagina.
- **Menstrual-type cramping**-You may feel cramps, low or near your pelvic bone, like before or during your period. The cramps may come and go or feel constant.
- **Change in vaginal discharge**- You may notice watery, mucous, or bloody (pink or brownish) discharge from the vagina.

What should I do?

If you think your water has broken, call us or go to the hospital right away.

If you are ever in doubt about what to do, you should go with your instinct and go to the first floor of the Women’s Center at The Medical Center of Arlington for evaluation. If you feel like you are having preterm contractions, you probably are. Listen to your body.

If you think you are having any of the above symptoms do the following things and call us right away:

1. Get off of your feet. Go lie down on your side.
2. Drink two very large glasses of water quickly.
3. Put your hands on your uterus. Count for contractions. Contractions can feel like the baby gets in a ball and your entire uterus gets hard and tight. These contractions may be crampy or painful.
4. If you continue to have more than 4 of these contractions in an hour, you should go to the hospital to rule out preterm labor.