

How to Recognise the Start of Labour?

Most women go into labour between 37 – 42 weeks of pregnancy. Around this time it is normal to feel tired, uncomfortable, have backache, pass urine frequently and have an increased vaginal discharge.

It is important for you to rest and prepare for your baby's birth, pack your bags, meet friends and family and enjoy your free time.

This leaflet is designed to help you:

- Recognise the beginning of labour
- Provide you with tips on staying at home during early labour
- Decide when to come to hospital

Signs of Labour

- You may have one or more of the following.

<u>Signs</u>	<u>Why it happens</u>
• 'Show' – sticky mucus vaginal discharge with streaks of red/brown blood.	The cervix is softening and thinning out in preparation for labour.
• Backache, pressure sensation.	Baby moving down in preparation for labour and birth-baby's head pressing on the bladder/bowel.
• Waters breaking	Baby's head moving down and a sign that labour may start.
• Cramps, tightening's contractions (pains)	Muscles of the womb tighten and relax to push the baby downwards and open cervix.

Some of these signs of labour: such as irregular or infrequent pains, backache, having a 'show' in themselves do not constitute labour: although they can be an indication that labour may soon start. This phase often known as 'pre- labour phase' can last for a few days before labour and birth occurs.

Tips for early labour

The **best** place for you to be when you are in early labour is at home, with familiar surroundings, family and friends.

<u>Tip</u>	<u>Why</u>
Go for a walk	Exercise and staying mobile helps the baby position itself for the labour.
Upright positions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use a birthing ball • Straddle a chair 	Open the pelvis to help the baby's head get into position for labour. Relieves backache. Facilitates back massage.
Bath/shower	Relieve backache and cramps, help you relax, provides diversion.
Rest	You may feel tired, listen to your body.
Music/TV/DVD	Provides diversion, helps you relax.
Go for a walk	Exercise and staying mobile helps the baby position itself for the labour.
Upright positions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use a birthing ball • Straddle a chair 	Open the pelvis to help the baby's head get into position for labour. Relieves backache. Facilitates back massage.

Tip	Why
Hot water bottle	Can ease backache
Birthing ball Beanbag Pillows	Assists you to get into comfortable positions during contractions.
TENS machine	May help with contraction pains
Deep breathing and massage.	A useful coping strategy to use during contractions. Also help you relax.

When to come to hospital

- If you think your waters have broken.
- If you have vaginal bleeding (other than a 'show').
- If your baby is not moving as much as usual.
- If you think you are in labour (see below).

If this is your first baby...

Everyone differs, however if you feel the contractions are becoming regular, stronger, lasting longer and you are finding it more difficult to cope – come to the hospital.

If this is your second or subsequent baby...

If you feel the contractions are becoming stronger and forming a pattern – come to the hospital.

(Bring your bag and hospital notes if you carry them).

Remember you can ring the Assessment Unit anytime (01 4085643) to speak to a midwife if you have any queries or concerns.

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