

Signs of Labor

Adapted from Pregnancy Childbirth and the Newborn

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	Signs	Comments
Possible signs of labor These may or may not be early signs of labor; time will tell.	Backache. Vague, low, nagging; may cause restlessness	Different, less defined than posture related backache from prolonged standing or sitting; may be caused by early contractions
	Menstrual-like cramps. May be accompanied by discomfort in thighs	May be intermittent or continuous; may be associated with prostaglandin action and early contractions
	Soft bowel movements. May be accompanied by intestinal cramps or digestive upset	May be related to increase in circulating prostaglandins, which ripen (soften and thin) your cervix
	Nesting urge. An unusual burst of energy resulting in great activity and a desire to complete preparations for baby	Think of this extra energy as a sign that you will have strength and stamina to handle labor; try to curb exhausting activity
Preliminary signs of labor These are signs of progress, but are still associated with very early labor or pre-labor.	Bloody show. Passage of blood-tinged mucus from vagina; pink or red	Associated with thinning (effacement) and early opening (dilation) of cervix; may occur days before other signs or not until progressing labor contractions have begun; continues through labor
	Leaking of amniotic fluid from the vagina. Caused by a small release of membranes (ROM); leaking of bag of waters	Sometimes stops when membranes seal or continues on and off for hours or days; may hasten softening of the cervix
	Non-progressing or infrequent contractions. Early labor contractions may start out 10 - 30 minutes apart, and gradually get closer together.	Accomplish softening and thinning (effacement) of cervix, although most dilation does not occur until you have positive signs. Periods of Braxton Hicks contractions may occur several times in the month before labor
Positive signs of labor These are the clearest signs of true labor.	Progressing contractions. Become longer, stronger, and closer together with time; and are felt in the abdomen, back, or both	Dilate cervix; are not reduced by mother's activity and will not subside because of a change in activity
	Gush of amniotic fluid from the vagina. (breaking the waters) Caused by a rupture of membranes (ROM) which surround the baby	Often accompanied or followed by progressing contractions. Only 10% of moms have labor that starts with the water breaking, for most it breaks during labor. If your water breaks, contact your provider.