



Inner Light Birth Services

Courtney Stern, Doula

(610) 420-8701

www.innerlightbirthservices.com

Signs of Labor

How will you know if it is “real labor”? There are often changes and signs that occur in the days before labor, letting you know that the body is warming up and labor could be occurring soon. Knowing that these signs occur long before the birth is imminent can help you take the appropriate steps to prepare for or encourage labor, and can save you from heading to the hospital too early.

Possible signs of labor

The following late pregnancy changes may be early signs of labor, or may occur days or weeks before active labor

Lightening

Backache

Menstrual type cramps

Soft bowel movements

Nesting urge

Lightening

Lightening occurs when the baby “drops,” or settles lower into your pelvis. Often you will find that your lungs have more room to expand and you are able to breathe more easily. Pressure may increase in your pelvis and you may need to urinate more often. Lightening usually occurs a couple of weeks prior to your first delivery. With subsequent births it may happen just hours before delivery.

Backache

This type of backache can be vague, low, and nagging. It may cause restlessness and feel different than posture related backache. It may be caused by early contractions.

Menstrual type cramps

These cramps may come and go or progress into early labor contractions, and are likely associated with prostaglandin action. They could be accompanied by discomfort in the thighs.

Soft bowel movements

If accompanied by other signs of labor, soft stools may be caused by an increase in prostaglandins that serve to ripen (soften and thin) your cervix. The mama may also feel “flu-like” symptoms with them.

Nesting urge

An unusual burst of energy resulting in great activity and a desire to complete preparations for baby. The mama should be sure to curb exhausting activity.

Preliminary signs of labor

These are signs of progress, but are still associated with very early labor or pre-labor. Real labor could still be days away.

Bloody Show

Leaking of amniotic fluid from the vagina

Non-progressing or irregular contractions

Bloody show

Passage of blood-tinged mucus from vagina. The mucus can be tinged pink or red, and is associated with thinning (effacement) and early dilation of cervix. It may continue intermittently throughout labor. If mucus is passed within a day of having a prenatal pelvic examination or sexual intercourse it is not a sign of labor.

Leaking of amniotic fluid from the vagina

A leak of amniotic fluid is caused by a small break in the amniotic sac. It is possible for the membranes to seal and stop the flow of fluid. Otherwise the fluid may continue to leak and on and off for hours or days. It is important to stay well hydrated and monitor yourself for infection. You should also note whether or not the fluid is clear – if it is yellow, green, or brown, contact your health care provider.

Non-progressing contractions

These contractions tend to stay about the same length, strength, and frequency, and may last for a short time or continue for hours before they go away. They can be irregular, they may ease with change of position, and they do not increase in frequency or intensity. They prepare the cervix to dilate.

Positive signs of labor

These are the clearest signs that the mama is in labor.

Progressing contractions

Gush of amniotic fluid from the vagina

Progressing contractions

These contractions become longer, stronger, and closer together over time. They are usually described as "painful" or "very strong," are felt in the abdomen, back, or both, and are not reduced by changes in mama's activity. It will be difficult or impossible to distract the mama from these contractions. For a first baby, you can assume the mother is in active labor when her contractions have been at least 1 minute long and 5 minutes or less apart for at least an hour (the 5-1-1 rule). Her contractions will most likely continue to build in intensity until the pushing phase of labor begins. If it is a second or subsequent baby, this type of contraction pattern may stop and start over the course of several days before it progresses to the pushing phase of labor.

Gush of amniotic fluid from the vagina

This gush occurs with a break in the amniotic sac and is often followed by intensifying contractions. If the amniotic fluid is yellow, green, or brown, contact your health care provider. If the amniotic sac breaks before labor begins, the mama should follow her plan for a Prelabor Rupture of Membranes (PROM). The vast majority of women begin to have progressing contractions within 72 hours of PROM.