



*Center for Women's Health*

### **For Your Information VI—Is it Labor?**

The onset of labor may be signaled by any of the following three symptoms: (1) bloody "show" (2) regular uterine contractions, or (3) rupture of membranes.

#### **Bloody Show:**

A bloody mucous discharge from the vagina, often associated with labor contractions, is called ~~bloody show.~~ It almost always occurs some time during labor. Bloody show may be so light that you may not notice it at all. It can be like a drop of blood with a stringy, clear bit of mucous; a smudge resembling heavy, thick saliva; or simply a watery blood stain. It is not unusual to have a small amount of blood-tinged discharge after a vaginal exam in the last weeks of pregnancy. Its appearance may be an indication that labor will begin.

#### **Contractions:**

During the last weeks of pregnancy you may feel contractions of your uterus. These Braxton-Hicks contractions, or ~~prodromal labor~~ contractions, signal that labor is approaching. Prodromal labor contractions may last for hours or even days, but change the dilation of your cervix. Braxton-Hicks contractions do not become progressively stronger and closer over time. Changing your activity pattern often relieves Braxton Hicks contractions.

Real labor, however, will not go away by changing your activity. Real labor contractions usually come at regular intervals, increase in frequency, last longer, and become more intense as time progresses. If this is your first pregnancy and you are having contractions every 3 to 4 minutes, each lasting 45 seconds or longer, over a period of two hours, you are probably in labor. Please call the office, talk to the doctor or nurse, and then go to the hospital. If you have had a fast labor in the past, ask your doctor for guidelines specific to you. Please call the office before going to the hospital. (See Table 1)

#### **Rupture of Membranes (Breaking Your Bag of Water):**

The rupture of membranes may result in a sudden gush or a slow leak of amniotic fluid. The fluid is usually clear and watery in consistency. If you have continuous leakage of small amounts of fluid when you are confident your bladder is empty, it may mean your membranes have ruptured. If you think your membranes may have ruptured, please call the office as soon as possible. We generally want to evaluate ruptured membranes, either in the office or at labor and delivery, within one hour of the time you start to leak.

#### **Just a Reminder:**

If you have enough vaginal bleeding to make a 2-3 inch circle of blood on your clothes or a pad, please call the office immediately. We will either see you in the office or send you to labor and delivery.

If you suspect labor is starting (see Table 2) and would like advice, call our office phone number (734) 712-1990. It is best you make the call yourself, rather than have someone else call for you. This way you will be able to answer the doctor's or nurse's questions directly and explain exactly how you feel.

**Table 1: Is It Real Labor or False Labor?**

	<u><b>Real Labor</b></u>	<u><b>False Labor</b></u>
Activity	Contractions don't change if you change activity.	Contractions stop or slow down when you change activity, e.g. go for a walk if they started when resting, or lay down if they started while you were active.
Where are the contractions?	Frequently the contractions are wave-like, starting in the back.	Usually contractions are felt in the low abdomen.
Contraction pattern	Contractions come at regular intervals and gradually get closer together and last longer.	Contractions are irregular in both timing and strength, do not become closer or harder over time.

**Table 2: Signs of Labor**

<u><b>Description</b></u>	<u><b>When Does It Occur?</b></u>	<u><b>Call The Office?</b></u>
<b>Lightening</b> - Feeling that the baby has dropped and you are able to breathe easier.	Can happen a few weeks or a few hours before labor.	No
<b>Loss of Mucous Plug</b> - large lump of mucous may be lost as the cervix begins to open.	Can happen a couple of weeks or a few hours before labor begins.	No
<b>Bloody Show</b> - Mucous that is pink, brown spotting as the cervix opens.	Several days or hours before labor, or at onset of labor.	No
<b>Rupture of Membranes</b> - Loss of fluid from vagina either a large gush or a small, continuous trickle of watery fluid.	Several hours before labor or any time during labor.	<u><b>YES</b></u>
<b>Contractions</b> - Cramping sensation in abdomen or back. With contractions your uterus becomes firm and you may feel pressure in your pelvis.	Usually this is the beginning of labor.	See Table 1 and paragraph discussing contractions.