

Signs of Labor

Adapted from Pregnancy Childbirth and the Newborn
by: Penny Simkin, P.T.; Janet Whaley, R.N., B.S.M.; and Ann Keppler, R.N., M.N.

Category	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 contractions. Tend to stay about the same length, strength, and frequency; pre-labor contractions that may last for a short time or continue for hours before they go away (Braxton-Hicks contractions)	Accomplish softening and thinning (effacement) of cervix, although most dilation does not occur until you have positive signs
Positive signs of labor. These are the clearest signs of true labor.	Progressing contractions. Become longer, stronger, and closer together with time; are usually described as "painful" or "very strong" 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. Caused by a large release of membranes (ROM)	Often accompanied or followed by progressing contractions