

## ***What causes preterm labor?***

**The causes of preterm labor** are not clearly understood. It is known that certain factors are connected with preterm labor and may increase your risks for preterm labor.

Women are at the greatest risk for preterm labor and birth is:

- Women with a history of previous preterm delivery
- Women who are pregnant with twins, triplets or more
- Women with certain uterine or cervical abnormalities

### **Lifestyle and Environmental risks:**

- Late or no prenatal care
- Periodontal disease (cavities)
- Smoking
- Urinary Tract Infections
- Using illicit drugs, alcohol,
- Exposure to the drug DES
- Domestic violence, including physical, sexual or emotional abuse
- Lack of social support
- Stress
- Long hours working with long periods of standing
- Sexually transmitted infections

## ***What you can do.....***

**Call your provider or go to the hospital right away** if you think you are having any signs of preterm labor:

- Contractions
- Menstrual-like cramping
- Low, dull backache
- Pelvic pressure
- Intestinal cramps
- Change in vaginal discharge
- A feeling that "something is just not right"

### **Your provider may tell you to:**

- Come into the office or go to the hospital.
- Stop what're doing. Rest on your left side for one hour and see if your symptoms stop.
- Drink 2-3 large glasses of water and see if your symptoms go away.

### ***Emergencies***

Sometimes, a problem can occur that needs attention right away.

**CALL YOUR PROVIDER** if you have:

- Bleeding
- Your water breaks or you think it is leaking
- Severe stomach pain

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## **Preterm Labor**

*The facts you  
need to know.....*

## ***PRETERM LABOR and Birth: A serious complication.***

**Preterm labor is labor** that occurs before the 37<sup>th</sup> week of pregnancy. It is the cause of many infant deaths and lingering infant illnesses in the US. About 12% (1 in 8) births in the US are born prematurely, often for reasons we just don't understand.

**A normal pregnancy** should last until 40-42 weeks. This amount of time gives the baby the best chance to be born healthy. Babies born between 20 and 37 weeks are considered preterm, and all preterm babies are at a significant risk for health problems. The earlier the birth, the greater the baby is at risk.

**Babies that are born** prematurely are at a high risk for:

- Brain injuries
- Breathing problems
- Digestive problems
- Death in first few days of life

## ***What is Labor?***

**Labor is the process** in which the uterus contracts or tightens in a regular pattern causing the cervix (opening to the uterus) to open and prepare for delivery. You are in labor when both uterine contractions and cervical change occur. The changes in the cervix that can occur are:

- Softening of the cervix.
- Shortening or thinning of the cervix.
- Opening of the cervix (dilation).
- Movement of the cervix from a backward to a forward position in the vagina.
- Lowering of the baby's head in the vagina.

## ***Are there warning signs of PRETERM LABOR?***

You have a better sense of the changes occurring in your body than anyone else and therefore you are the best person to identify these early warning signs. Reporting them to your provider may mean better management of your pregnancy.

## **Warning Signs of Preterm Labor**

- ***Uterine contractions*** occurring at a rate of 4 or more per hour. Your abdomen becomes tight. Contractions can be painless or uncomfortable. It may feel as though the baby is "balling up".
- ***Menstral-like cramps*** felt low in the abdomen, just above the pubic bone. They may be constant or they may come or go.
- ***Low, dull backache*** located mainly in the lower back and may radiate to the sides or front not relieved by a change in position.
- ***Pelvic pressure*** or heaviness experienced in the lower abdomen, back or thighs. It may feel as though the baby is going to "fall out".
- ***Intestinal cramps*** that may feel like "gas pains" with or without diarrhea.
- ***Vaginal discharge*** may become pink or brown tinged or even bright red, mucous like or watery.
- ***"Something is just not right"***. Many women with preterm labor just have a sense that something is wrong.