

# Signs and symptoms of preterm labor

Even if you do everything right, you can still have preterm labor. Preterm labor is labor that happens too early, before 37 weeks of pregnancy.

Babies born before 37 weeks of pregnancy are called premature. Premature babies can have serious health problems at birth and later in life. Learning the signs and symptoms of preterm labor may help keep your baby from being born too early.



## TAKE ACTION

### Learn the signs and symptoms of preterm labor.

Call your provider if you have even one sign or symptom:

- Change in your vaginal discharge (watery, mucus or bloody) or more vaginal discharge than usual
- Pressure in your pelvis or lower belly, like your baby is pushing down
- Constant low, dull backache
- Belly cramps with or without diarrhea
- Regular or frequent contractions that make your belly tighten like a fist. The contractions may or may not be painful.
- Your water breaks.

When you see your provider, she may check your cervix to see if you're in labor. If you're in labor, your provider may give you treatment to help stop labor or to improve your baby's health before birth. If you have preterm labor, getting help is the best thing you can do.

### Are you at risk for preterm labor?

No one knows for sure what causes preterm labor. But there are some things that may make you more likely than other women to give birth early. These are called risk factors.

#### These three risk factors make you most likely to have preterm labor:

1. You've had a premature baby in the past.
2. You're pregnant with multiples (twins, triplets or more).
3. You have problems with your uterus or cervix or you've had these problems in the past.

#### Other risk factors include:

- You're overweight or underweight.
- Premature birth runs in your family.
- You have certain health conditions, like diabetes, high blood pressure or depression.
- You smoke, drink alcohol or use harmful drugs.
- You have a lot of stress in your life.
- You get pregnant too soon after having a baby.

Learn about other risks for preterm labor at: [marchofdimes.org](http://marchofdimes.org)

## WATCH A VIDEO

[marchofdimes.org/preterm labor](http://marchofdimes.org/preterm labor)