

# How Do I Know When I'm in Labor?

You are here today because you felt that you were in labor. You may be disappointed to hear that you are not yet in true labor. The difference between false labor, also called pre-labor, and true labor can be confusing. Here are some ways to help tell the difference.

## Pre-Labor

Pre-labor is very common and at times the only way to tell if it is true or pre-labor is by a vaginal exam. A vaginal exam will determine if the cervix is dilating and true labor has begun.

- Pre-labor is where your uterus (womb) has contractions that are not strong enough to dilate your cervix or open the mouth of the womb.
- The contractions may be regular or irregular and may feel strong.
- The strength of contractions in pre-labor does not increase.
- The contractions do not last longer as time goes on, and they do not become more frequent.
- Sometimes, the contractions go away with walking.

## True Labor

- True labor is when your uterus has contractions that dilate your cervix.

More on next page →

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- Contractions come more often, are stronger and last longer over time.
- Walking makes your contractions stronger. That is why you need to walk if you are not sure if you are in true labor.
- The discomfort of true labor contractions often starts in your back and comes around to the front.
- Bloody show may occur. This is a pink-tinged mucous discharge from your vagina.
- The breaking (rupture) of your bag of water may occur. If this happens, call your doctor to get directions on what to do.

## **When Having Contractions**

Sometimes it takes time to know pre-labor from true labor.

- If this is your first baby and your contractions are five (5) minutes apart for two (2) hours, you are probably in early true labor.
- If you have already had a baby and your contractions are five (5) minutes apart for one (1) hour, you are probably in early true labor.

✦ **Talk to your doctor or others on your health care team if you have questions. You may request more written information from the Library for Health Information at (614) 293-3707 or email: [health-info@osu.edu](mailto:health-info@osu.edu).**