

Outstanding Care,
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Sherwood Forest Hospitals
NHS Foundation Trust

Think you might be in labour?

Information for women, birthing parents and carers



**Maternity
Services**

With you every step of the way

**A guide to recognising labour and knowing when to
contact Maternity Triage Centre**

Every labour is different. Some people have clear, regular contractions, while others notice more subtle changes. If you think labour might be starting, this guide can help you understand what is happening and when to contact your maternity team

Remember - If something doesn't feel right or you need reassurance, you can always call us.

Signs that labour may be starting

Labour often begins gradually. You might notice some of the following changes:

Tightenings (contractions):

- Your abdomen tightens and then relaxes.
- They may feel like strong period pains or lower back pains.
- At first, they may be irregular and far apart.

A 'show'

You may pass a small amount of sticky mucus, sometimes streaked with blood. This is normal and shows your cervix is preparing for labour.

Waters breaking

You may notice a gush or a slow trickle of fluid from the vagina.

Backache or pelvic pressure

Some people feel constant lower back pain.

Changes in mood or energy

Feeling restless, emotional, tired or excited can all be normal. Early labour can last hours or sometimes a few days. Try to rest, eat and drink normally, and stay comfortable.

Early (latent) labour – what to expect

Early labour is when your body is preparing for active labour. Contractions may be:

- Irregular.
- Mild to moderate.
- Short (often under 40 seconds).
- Several minutes apart.

Many people cope best at home during this stage if everything is normal. This is recommended in national guidance because labour often progresses more comfortably at home.

Things that may help you cope at home

You might find the following helpful:

Stay comfortable:

- Try a warm bath or shower.
- Use a heat pack on your back.
- Gentle massage from your birth partner.

Keep moving:

- Walk around the house.
- Use a birthing ball.
- Change position regularly.

Relax your breathing

Slow breathing during contractions can help manage discomfort.

Rest when you can

Labour can be long, so saving energy is helpful.

Eat and drink

Have light meals and drinks as you feel able. Some people also use:

- TENS machine.
- Paracetamol (if suitable for you).

When labour becomes established

Labour is usually considered established when:

- Contractions are regular and strong.
- They last around 45 - 60 seconds.
- They occur about every 3 - 4 minutes.
- This pattern continues for at least an hour.

You may also notice:

- Stronger pressure in your pelvis.
- Increasing need to focus during contractions.

At this stage it may be time to contact the Maternity Triage Centre.

When to contact the birthing unit

Please contact us if:

- Your contractions are regular, strong and close together.
- Your waters break.
- You notice bleeding.
- Your baby's movements change or reduce.
- You feel intense pressure in your bottom.
- You have pain over a previous caesarean scar.
- You feel you cannot cope at home.
- Something doesn't feel right.
- You simply need advice or reassurance.

You are always welcome to call.

If your waters break

Contact the birthing unit if:

- Your waters are green, brown or have a strong smell.
- You are less than 37 weeks pregnant.
- You are not feeling your baby move normally.
- Labour does not start within the time advised by your midwife.


Trust your instincts

Labour does not look the same for everyone. Some people:

- Do not have obvious timed contractions.
- Progress very quickly.
- Just feel that 'something is happening'.

If you feel unsure, please contact the Maternity Triage Centre. We are here to support you.

Maternity Triage Centre (open 24 hours)

 01623 655722

Further sources of information

- NHS: www.nhs.uk/pregnancy
- Your community midwife
- Your maternity notes (BadgerNet).

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