



William Osler  
Health System

# Preterm Labour

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Preterm Birth  
Making a Difference

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## What is Preterm labour?

**Preterm labour** is labour that **begins before 37 weeks** and may result in your baby being born too soon.

Usually, pregnancy lasts between 37 and 42 weeks.

Medical experts do not know all the reasons why labour starts too early.

## How Do I Know If I am Having Preterm Labour?

It is not always easy for a woman to tell if she is experiencing preterm labour. Many of the signs of preterm labour can feel the same as some of the changes that normally happen in the second half of pregnancy.

**If there is a change in what you normally feel such as:**

- Low dull backache or thigh pain
- Pelvic pressure (feeling full or heavy)
- Discharge from the vagina

The important signs to watch for, especially if they are **new or different** are:

- A sudden gush or a constant slow leak of fluid from the vagina
- Bleeding from the vagina
- Contractions of the uterus (menstrual-like or abdominal cramps)

Some women may just feel that “**something is not right**”

Preterm labour contractions feel **different** from the normal tightenings that many women feel in the second half of pregnancy.

- They may feel more regular
- They do not go away if you move or lie down

You may feel other signs at the same time as the contractions, such as fluid leaking from the vagina or pelvic pressure.

## Can it Happen to Me?

**Preterm labour can happen in any pregnancy. Some women are more likely to have preterm labour because they:**

- had preterm labour or a preterm birth before
- are carrying more than one baby, twins or triplets for example
- smoke
- are underweight
- are not getting enough healthy foods
- have a lot of stress in their lives
- may have vaginal or bladder infection

## What Should I Do if I have Preterm Labour?

**Tell someone that you are having these signs. GO TO THE HOSPITAL** if you are experiencing any of the signs of preterm labour.

**REMEMBER, you know yourself and your body best!**

- Don't be shy, **ask** your health care provider if you have questions
- **Learn** what can decrease the chances of preterm labour
- **Learn** the signs and symptoms of preterm labour
- **Know what you need to do if preterm labour happens**