

Types of Contractions

Contractions, a tightening and hardening of your abdomen, are a normal part of pregnancy. They occur when the uterine muscles tighten, just like flexing other muscles. During labor, contractions play two very important roles: they cause the cervix to thin (efface) and dilate (open); and they help your baby to descend.

FALSE LABOR / BRAXTON HICKS CONTRACTIONS:

- These are warm up or practice contractions.
- Usually start in the second trimester.
- Felt in just the front of abdomen.
- Dehydration or exertion can bring them on.
- Random and irregular – they should subside if you drink a glass of water and lie down to rest.
- Can be triggered by a full bladder.
- They are completely normal!

NOTE: If you are still early in pregnancy and experience contractions accompanied by spotting, bleeding and/or abdominal pain, see your care provider right away.



EARLY LABOR CONTRACTIONS:

DURATION: 30–45 SECONDS
FREQUENCY: 5–30 MINUTES

- Usually irregular and far apart.
- Uncomfortable: like menstrual cramps or gas pains.
- You may be able to sleep, have a conversation or do other activities while having contractions.



ACTIVE LABOR CONTRACTIONS:

DURATION: 45–60 SECONDS
FREQUENCY: 3–5 MINUTES

- Generally 3–5 minutes apart, about 1 minute long.
- Most women find that it's difficult to talk through contractions by this phase of labor.
- Occur at regular intervals.
- You may need verbal reassurance or help with comfort measures.



TRANSITION CONTRACTIONS:

DURATION: 60–90 SECONDS
FREQUENCY: 2–3 MINUTES

- Quite long (up to two minutes) and strong.
- Usually only short breaks in between contractions.
- Most women experience pressure in the vagina and rectum during contractions.
- You may experience shaking, vomiting, chills, and wanting to give up.



PUSHING CONTRACTIONS: (10 CM DILATED – BIRTH OF BABY)

DURATION: 45–90 SECONDS
FREQUENCY: 3–5 MINUTES

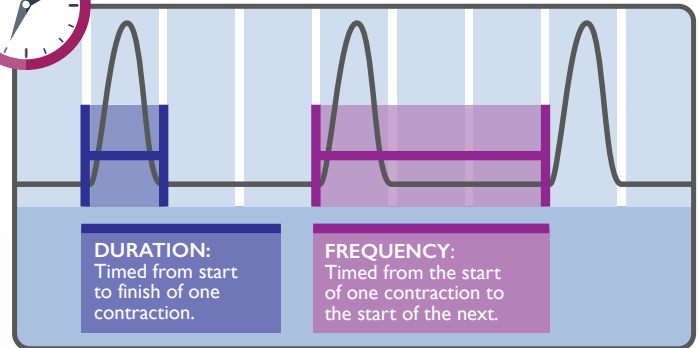
- You will feel an overwhelming urge to push.
- Feels like having to have a bowel movement.
- Contractions may slow, allowing more rest in between, and you may get a burst of energy.

POST-BIRTH CONTRACTIONS:

- Contractions birth the placenta shortly after the baby.
- The uterus will continue to contract as it returns to its pre-pregnancy size (strongest 2–3 days after birth).
- Breastfeeding may trigger contractions.



HOW TO TIME CONTRACTIONS:



IS IT TIME TO GO TO THE HOSPITAL? FOLLOW THE 5-1-1 RULE:

