

Understanding False Labor

False labor happens when you feel contractions, but it is not time for your baby to be born yet. Uterine contractions can feel like your belly or uterus gets tight or hard for a few seconds at a time. These are sometimes called Braxton-Hicks contractions or “practice contractions.” They help your body get ready for real labor, but they do not mean labor has started.

False labor can make you feel unsure or worried, but it is a normal part of pregnancy. It can cause discomfort, but it is not harmful.



Why Does False Labor Happen?

False labor does not cause your cervix to open, so it is not a sign that your baby is ready to be born. False labor symptoms are more common if:

- You are being very active or exercising a lot.
- You have a full bladder.
- Your baby is moving.
- You are touching or pressing on your belly.
- You are not drinking enough water.

Symptoms of False Labor

It is not always easy to tell if you are having Braxton-Hicks or real labor contractions. Here are some signs that your contractions may be Braxton-Hicks:

- Tightening of the belly comes and goes.
- Contractions do not get stronger or closer together.
- Discomfort goes away if you change your position, move around, or rest.
- Mild cramps come and go.
- You have no bloody discharge or fluid leaking from the vagina.

What Should I Do?

If you think you are having false labor:

- Try changing your position. If you are sitting, try standing or walking. If you are standing, try sitting or lying down.
- Drink a glass of water. Dehydration can make contractions worse.
- Rest and relax. Taking a warm shower or bath may help.
- Practice slow, deep breathing.
- Keep track of your contractions. Write down how often they happen and how long they last.

If you are not sure if it is real labor, call your care team. They are there to help you.

Who Can Get False Labor?

Any pregnant person can have false labor, but it may be more common if:

- You are in your last 3 months of pregnancy.
- You have had a baby before.
- You are very active.
- You do not drink enough water.

Risks

False labor is usually not harmful, but it can be confusing or stressful. If you mistake real labor for false labor, you might wait too long to get help. That is why it is important to know the signs and call your care team if you are not sure.



How to Prevent False Labor

You may not be able to prevent false labor, but you can try to:

- Drink enough water every day.
- Rest when you feel tired.
- Avoid very hard or heavy exercise.
- Empty your bladder often.

When to Call Your Care Team

Call your care team if:

- You are not sure if your contractions are real or false.
- You have contractions that get stronger, last longer, or come closer together.



- You have any vaginal bleeding or leaking of fluid.
- You feel less movement from your baby than usual.
- You have any questions or feel worried.

When to Call 911 or Go to the Emergency Room

Call for help right away if:

- You have heavy vaginal bleeding.
- You have severe pain that does not go away.
- You feel like you might faint or pass out.
- You have trouble breathing.
- You think your water has broken, and the fluid is green or smells bad.

Thank You for Choosing Us

Thank you for trusting us with your care. We are here to support you and want you to feel your best. Contact us with any questions.

IF YOU HAVE A MEDICAL EMERGENCY, CALL 911 OR GO TO THE EMERGENCY ROOM.

The information presented is intended for general information and educational purposes. It is not intended to replace the advice of your health care provider. Contact your health care provider if you believe you have a health problem.

Last updated May 2025