

Braxton Hicks contractions

Braxton Hicks contractions happen when the muscles of your womb tighten. They are more common during the last few months of your pregnancy, but can happen at any time.

Braxton Hicks contractions can happen on and off. They are practice contractions but they are not labour contractions.

Contact your midwife or maternity unit or hospital if:

- you have any contractions that are getting stronger or closer together
- your contractions are accompanied by other signs of labour

[Contractions and other signs of labour](#)

What Braxton Hicks contractions feel like

During a Braxton Hicks contraction, your tummy can feel hard. After the contraction finishes, it will feel soft again.

Each contraction usually lasts about 30 to 60 seconds. They can happen several times in a day. Sometimes they can go away when you exercise, and come back when you rest.

Usually, Braxton Hicks contractions are not as strong or as regular as labour. It can be hard to tell the difference between labour contractions and Braxton Hicks contractions. If you're not sure, speak to your midwife.

Differences between Braxton Hicks and labour contractions

Braxton Hicks contractions:

- are shorter (they last 30 to 60 seconds)
- happen from time to time
- have no regular pattern
- happen less often
- feel like a tightening or a squeezing, but are not usually painful

'Labour pains' or labour contractions:

- are longer (last more than 30 seconds)
- happen more often and become closer together
- are regular
- feel like a tightening, but become more intense

What to do if you have Braxton Hicks contractions

Try and stay relaxed. Practising [breathing exercises](#) can help with this. Going for a short walk can also help.

Sometimes a warm bath can help you to feel more comfortable.

Ask your birth partner to rub your back or shoulders. This might help you to feel more relaxed.

Drink plenty of fluids and eat regularly to keep your energy levels up.

When to get medical help

Contact your midwife or maternity unit or hospital if:

- your contractions are becoming stronger or more intense
- your contractions are coming closer together
- you have fluid gushing or [leaking from your vagina](#)
- you have any [vaginal bleeding](#)
- there is a change or reduction in your baby's movements

Trust your instincts – if you feel something is not right, get checked.

[Your baby's movements during pregnancy](#)

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