

## **Preterm Labor Precautions**

One of the most common reasons for a newborn baby to have serious problems is prematurity. The chances of your having a premature delivery can be significantly reduced by calling us with early symptoms of preterm labor. If diagnosed early, we have medications and interventions that can sometimes help prevent a premature delivery. Therefore, it is important for you to know which symptoms are normal in the third trimester of pregnancy and which you would need to discuss with us.

### **Contractions**

The uterus (womb) is composed of muscle fibers. Contractions usually feel like a "hardening" of your uterus, or "balling up" of your stomach although they can also feel like mild menstrual cramps. Each contraction may last anywhere from 20 seconds to 1 1/2 minutes. Once you enter the period after 22-24 weeks, it is fairly normal to experience occasional contractions. If you have been on your feet a lot or if you are dehydrated, sometimes these contractions can become more frequent. However if you feel four or more contractions in one hour, you should rest and drink extra fluids. If after resting for an hour or so you still have greater than four contractions, you should call us regardless of the time of the day.

### **Pelvic pressure**

It is also common to feel some pelvic pressure, especially if you have been very active. However, if you feel a large increase in the amount of pelvic pressure and this does not resolve with rest for an hour, you should contact us.

### **Vaginal Discharge**

Some increase in the amount of your vaginal discharge is normal in late pregnancy. A significant increase in the amount of discharge, especially if it is accompanied by increased contractions or vaginal / back pressure can be a sign of early preterm labor and should be reported to us. Also, any bleeding should be immediately reported to us.

In summary, you should call us promptly with any of the following symptoms:

- More than four contractions in one hour or lower abdominal cramps that do not resolve with rest.
- A significant increase in vaginal pressure that does not go away after resting.
- Any bleeding or significant increase in the amount of vaginal discharge.