

Kick Count

Around week 32, your provider will ask you to begin doing kick counts. You'll want to schedule some time each day to count your baby's kicks when they're most active. Note how long it takes for your baby to move ten times. Ideally there should be about ten kicks in a two-hour span. Call your medical provider if anything seems wrong or if your baby doesn't seem to be moving.³

Prenatal CheckUps

As your pregnancy gets closer to the end, your provider will want to see you more frequently. They'll track your progress and check for signs of early labor, such as your cervix dilating or consistent contractions. They will also check to see that your baby is positioned in the head-down position for birth. Attending all of your appointments will help to ensure that you and your baby continue to do well until the end of your pregnancy.^{1,2}

Line Up Help

Allow your friends to help with meals, cleaning, and any other assistance you may need around the house. Arrange in advance for someone to take you to the hospital if you live alone. It is not safe to drive yourself while you are in labor. Consider asking someone to stay with you in the beginning after the birth to help out, even if it's just to watch your baby so you can shower and get some rest. Write out your birth plan and give a copy to everyone involved. Things may not go as planned, it is still helpful to be prepared.

Preparing for Your Baby

Prepare ahead of time by having a crib/bassinet ready. Co-sleeping is discouraged by the American Academy of Pediatrics because it significantly increases the risk of SIDS. Instead, try room sharing with your infant. Room sharing allows you to be close by for feedings, comfort, and monitoring without the added risk.⁴

Make sure you purchase and install your car seat in advance. All fifty states require it before the baby leaves the hospital. Remember to ALWAYS place your infant rear-facing, and make sure you read the instruction manual to ensure you are installing and using the seat correctly. It's always a good idea to have your seat inspected. You can find a certified car seat technician in your area at www.nhtsa.gov/parents-and-caregivers.⁵

And finally, part of being on the go with your baby is making sure you have everything they need. Pack a diaper bag with diapers, wipes, an extra outfit, pacifiers, and a couple of bottles with powdered or ready-made formula, if you are not breastfeeding. You may want to add more items later but start with the basics.

Braxton Hicks Contractions

Braxton Hicks contractions may increase in frequency the closer you get to delivery, and they may help soften the cervix for labor. They may be uncomfortable or burn like a menstrual cramp. But, unlike actual labor, they don't have a consistent pattern and will eventually stop. You will feel a tightening of the uterus for around 30 to 60 seconds. Braxton Hicks can be triggered by too much activity, a full bladder, not drinking enough water, or sometimes by sex. You can alleviate them by changing positions (sitting, standing, etc.), drinking more water, or taking a warm bath. It's important to monitor any contractions you have. More than four contractions in an hour at this stage could be a sign of early labor. Another sign would be if they increase in intensity and frequency. But if you notice any of these signs, then you should call your provider.^{1,6}

Signs of Labor

During pregnancy, your body creates a mucus plug that blocks the opening of the cervix. When labor is about to begin, the plug gets pushed out and you may see it as a pink-tinged discharge. If it does come out, it doesn't mean you need to head to the hospital just yet, but be aware, that is a sign that labor is coming.^{1,2,11}

Effacement is the thinning of your cervix. Your provider will check for signs of it during your checkups. It is usually a good indication that labor is close.³

Dilation happens when your cervix begins to open for childbirth. Early dilation doesn't mean you are in labor; it just means your body is preparing for it. Your provider will also measure and track the dilation of your cervix at your checkups.²

Often before labor begins, the fluid-filled sac surrounding your baby breaks, releasing the amniotic fluid, which is typically odorless and colorless. This is the official start of labor. If this happens, contact your medical provider right away.

Go directly to the hospital if any of these four things happen: leaking water; heavy bleeding, decreased movement in your baby; or regular, painful contractions.²

Labor

Early labor will begin with mild and irregular contractions lasting about 30 to 45 seconds at 30-minute intervals. Unlike Braxton Hicks Contractions, they won't stop if you change position or activity.⁹ Make sure to keep track of your contractions. Count from the beginning of one contraction to the beginning of the next. You can use an app on your phone for this. Active labor is more uncomfortable. Contractions will last longer, become stronger, and happen more regularly and closer together, lasting 45 to 60 seconds with 3 to 5 minutes of rest between them. The transition phase in labor is the most challenging for pain. Your cervix will completely dilate, and your contractions will last about 60 to 90 seconds with only 30 seconds to 2 minutes of rest between them. Eventually you'll feel the urge to push. You'll want to let the medical staff know when this begins to happen.^{7,8}

Baby Items

Here are some baby items that you may want to think about getting before giving birth to your baby.⁹

- *An Infant thermometer*
- *Three to four fitted sheets and waterproof pads for a crib or bassinet*
- *Receiving blankets for swaddling your newborn*
- *A few bigger blankets for use outside of the crib*
- *Around eight dozen diapers*
- *Baby wipes*
- *Weather-appropriate infant clothing*
- *Footed onesies*
- *Baby shampoo and soap, and a hooded towel for bath time*
- *Baby fingernail clippers*
- *A nasal aspirator, more commonly known as a booger sucker*
- *Bottles*

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