



## PREMATURE BIRTH PREVENTION

### ARE YOU PREGNANT?

### THIS IS FOR YOU!

#### WHAT IS PREMATURE LABOUR?

Premature or preterm labour occurs before 37 weeks of pregnancy.

The normal duration of a term pregnancy is between 37 and 42 weeks.

Premature labour is manifested by frequent uterine contractions which may lead to cervical dilatation (open) and / or efface (shorten).

#### COULD IT HAPPEN TO ME?

Premature labour can happen to any pregnant woman. Even if you are in perfect health, it can still happen to you. Sometimes there is no obvious cause.

***Remember: this doesn't just happen to other people!***

#### WHAT ARE THE RISK FACTORS?

Causes of premature labour are sometimes difficult to detect. However, we do know that some women are at higher risk than others. The causes of preterm labour can be linked to various risk factors:

- Previous history of a premature delivery
- Vaginal bleeding during the second or third trimesters of pregnancy
- Placenta previa (a placenta that implants and develops over the cervix)
- Cervical incompetence (when the cervix cannot stay closed)
- Premature rupture of membranes (the bag of water)
- Uterine malformations
- Uterine fibroids (benign masses)
- Multiple pregnancy (twins, triplets or more)
- High blood pressure and/or pre-eclampsia
- Infections: urinary, vaginal and even dental
- Bad lifestyle factors: tobacco use, drugs, alcohol, unhealthy diet, stress
- Strenuous or stressful work
- Low pre-pregnancy body weight or insufficient weight gain during pregnancy

- Maternal age under 17 or over 40 years
- Multiple previous abortions (voluntary interruption or spontaneous such as miscarriage)
- Removal of part of the cervix (ablation) or other treatments to the cervix
- Fetal anomalies
- Physical or emotional violence

## WHAT ARE THE RISKS TO MY BABY?

Babies born prematurely are naturally fragile and can be very sick. Depending on how premature the babies are, their lives can be at risk, and they can suffer long term health problems. When babies are born before 37 weeks of pregnancy, their bodies are formed, but their organs are not completely mature, especially their lungs. Every additional week of pregnancy helps reduce the risks of prematurity. These premature babies need specialized care, and their hospital stay can be quite long.

## WHAT IS A CONTRACTION?

A contraction happens when the entire uterus, which is a muscle, contracts. The abdomen hardens. This can last approximately **30 to 60 seconds**. These contractions are not necessarily painful, they can even sometimes be **silent**. However, you can detect them by paying close attention to various signs that can happen.

## WHAT ARE THE SIGNS OF PREMATURE LABOUR?

You may notice **one** or **several** of the following signs:

- Abdominal cramps, in the lower abdomen
- Menstrual-like cramping
- A feeling of pressure low in the belly, in the vagina, in the lower back, in the rectum, in the bladder, or a feeling that the baby is pushing downwards
- **The false impression** that the baby is curling up in a ball
- Vaginal bleeding or pinkish discharge

If you notice any of these signs, it is important to feel your own belly so you can familiarise yourself with your contractions.

- Sit or lie down comfortably
- Put one hand on each side of your belly
- While feeling for tightness, watch for the following signs:
  - ✓ Abdominal cramps (especially low down), or menstrual-like cramping
  - ✓ A feeling of pressure low in the belly, in the vagina, in the lower back, or in the rectum (a feeling like the baby is pushing downwards)
  - ✓ Pressure on the bladder, or a sudden urge to urinate
  - ✓ A frequent need to pass stool
  - ✓ Clear vaginal discharge, similar to water
  - ✓ Bloody or pinkish discharge

### Remember:

- The length of contractions can vary, but they usually last (+/-) 60 seconds
- Premature labour contractions are frequently painless (silent) **BUT** can also become uncomfortable or even painful
- If your belly is as hard as your forehead, *that is a contraction*
- If your belly is soft like your cheek, *that is not a contraction*
- Does your belly seem to be hard only on one side? *That is a contraction*. The uterus can be tilted to one side because of the baby's position.
- Only a contraction can make your whole belly tighten, it is not your baby curling up into a ball

### But isn't it normal to have contractions?

Yes! It is a normal phenomenon! All pregnant women will have occasional contractions. They can happen while at rest, or with *movement*, for example when walking, getting up, after urinating, after sexual relations, when standing for long periods, etc.

**There is no such thing as a "false" contraction.**

#### **Before 37 weeks of pregnancy:**

- ✓ 5 to 6 contractions per day? **That's normal**
- ✓ 5 to 6 contractions in 1 hour? **Do the ABC's**

### What should I do if I have contractions?

#### ABC:

- Activity. STOP the activity that you are doing. Empty your bladder. Drink 2 or 3 glasses of water or juice.
- Bath. Take a relaxing bath for around 15 minutes.
- Contractions. After the bath, rest for 30 minutes. Place your hands on either side of your belly and check for contractions.

### When should I go to the hospital?

- If → your contractions continue despite your **ABC**
- If → you are unsure as to what you are feeling
- If → you are worried
- If → you have vaginal bleeding or pinkish discharge (even just a bit).
- If → you have watery vaginal discharge (a bit, a lot, or if you are unsure)
- If → you are having pain

**NO NEED TO CALL FIRST! GO TO THE HOSPITAL RIGHT AWAY! THERE IS NO GOOD REASON TO DELAY!**

**Remember:**

**Never wait for the contractions to become painful before contacting us. NEVER HESITATE TO GO OR TO COME BACK TO THE HOSPITAL! YOU ARE NEVER BOTHERING US! YOU ARE SHOWING PROPER CAUTION!**

**We are your team, and are here to serve you 24/7.**

Have you been put on full or partial bedrest?

**UNTIL 37 WEEKS:**

- No housework
- Limit time standing to 30 minutes or less
- No heavy lifting
- Restrict non essential outings (shopping, groceries)
- No exercise or sports
- No sexual intercourse
- Set aside adequate time for sleep at night and naps during the day
- Eat well and drink 8 to 10 glasses of water a day
- No smoking, street drugs and/or alcohol
- If you feel that your workplace duties are a problem, speak to your doctor or midwife

(SOGC: <https://sogc.org/publications-resources/public-information-pamphlets.html?id=21>)

***ACCEPT HELP...DO NOTHING...AND DELEGATE!***

## **RESOURCES**

**Do you have questions?**

**<http://cisss-ouataouais.gouv.qc.ca/papillon-program>**

**Go to Accessing a service / Having a baby / Pregnancy and delivery / Preventing premature labor (Papillon Program)**

**Hôpital de Gatineau**

**Service de l'obstétrique (Birthing Rooms):**

**819-966-6395 (day-evening-night)**

**SOGC: <https://sogc.org/publications-resources/public-information-pamphlets.html?id=21>**

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