

### The most common signs that labor may soon begin

- ✓ Baby drops/engages into the pelvis (called lightening) - this may occur 2-4 weeks prior to labor in first-time moms, but normally not until labor begins if you have previously had children.
- ✓ Your abdomen usually appears lower and protrudes more.
- ✓ You may experience greater ease in breathing, relief from heartburn, and be unable to eat larger portions of food.
- ✓ Increased backache.
- ✓ Increased awkwardness in walking.
- ✓ Increased frequency of urination.
- ✓ Frequent bowel movements.
- ✓ Diarrhea or flu-like symptoms.
- ✓ Increased vaginal discharge.
- ✓ Increased Braxton-Hick's contractions.
- ✓ Possible "bloody show" or loss of the mucus plug.
- ✓ A sudden burst of energy called the "nesting instinct" 24-48 hours before the start of labor; you may feel a strong urge to clean and prepare for the baby.
- ✓ A loss or leveling off of weight; it's common to lose 1-3 lbs of fluid before labor begins due to hormonal shifts.
- ✓ Your water may break.

### The Early Phase of Labor

The early phase of labor is effacement and dilation of the cervix from 0-3 centimeters with contractions that are 5-20 minutes apart, lasting 30-45 seconds. Contractions become longer, stronger, and more frequent over time.

It's important to relax, begin slow-paced breathing during the contraction, assume an upright position as much as possible and to alternate being up and walking, with periods of rest. You should try to empty your bladder every hour, drink plenty of fluids, eat lightly, walk & change positions.

### Early phase of the first stage of labor

- ✓ Contractions are often described as a cramping or tightening sensation that starts in your back and moves around to the front in a wave-like manner. Others describe it as severe pressure and minimally painful, if at all. Each will gradually get stronger until it peaks and then slowly decrease and go away.
- ✓ Contractions may be irregular at first but become regular over time.
- ✓ Contractions get longer, stronger, and closer together over time.
- ✓ Walking usually makes them stronger (opposite of Braxton-Hicks)
- ✓ Lying down or changing positions does not make them go away