

# Preterm Labor Prevention Action Plan

Preterm births occur in 1 out of every 10 infants born in the United States. Once a woman is identified to be at-risk, providers often offer treatment which may include education and medication to help prolong pregnancy. The cause of preterm labor is unknown. There are factors that may increase your chances of preterm labor and birth such as smoking, not having adequate prenatal care, and a history of preterm labor. If you have been diagnosed with being at-risk for a preterm birth, the chart below may help to manage your health during your pregnancy. In the green section, you will be provided with information to encourage you to continue maintaining your health during pregnancy. In the yellow section, you will be provided with information that can assist you in modifying your actions to help with having a healthy pregnancy. In the red section, you will be provided with information that is urgent and will require immediate attention from your provider.

**IMPORTANT: If you have any questions or concerns please be sure to contact your Obstetrics (OB) Provider.**

## Action Plan for Reducing Your Risk of Preterm Birth

See section titled “next steps” for recommendations of current conditions

### Keep Doing

#### Things to Monitor

- No pain
- Fetal movement felt

#### Hydration

- Adequate hydration; at least eight 8 ounce glasses of water or provider-recommended amount

#### Dental Health

- Healthy teeth and gums

#### Activity

- Able to stay active

#### Support System

- Adequate emotional stability or support

#### Rest

- Adequate sleep

### Need for Change

#### Slight Headache

- No changes in sight

#### Urinary Tract Infection

- Burning urination
- Blood in urine
- Sudden increase in frequency and urgency in trips to the bathroom

#### Braxton Hicks Contractions that are Uncomfortable<sup>1</sup>

- Mild back pain

#### Swelling of Feet and Ankles

- Puffiness
- Trouble fitting into shoes

#### Increased Stress Level

- e.g. financial change, life-changing experience

### Get Medical Help

#### Really Bad Headache

- Sudden swollen hands and face
- Spots before your eyes

#### Decreased Fetal Movement

- Baby not moving as much as normal

#### Bleeding from the Vagina/Spotting/Water breaking

- Change in vaginal discharge (watery, mucus, or bloody) or sudden increase
- Lower stomach cramps with or without diarrhea
- Gush/slow leaking of fluid

#### \*\*\*EMERGENCY\*\*\*

#### Contractions

- More than 4 in an hour
- Pelvic pain/pressure, like baby is pushing down
- Constant low dull backache

#### Something Pushing out from Vagina

- Baby's body part
- Umbilical cord
- Thoughts of harming yourself or baby
- Lower stomach pain
- Fever or chills

**Important: This information is not intended to replace professional medical care or advice. Always follow your healthcare professional's instructions.**

# Next Steps

In case of an emergency, please call 911

## Keep Doing

### Things to Continue

- Take medications as prescribed (e.g. nifedipine and prenatal vitamins)
- Continue going to scheduled OB appointments
- Have recommended perinatal testing/screenings done
- Avoid smoking, drinking, or use of street drugs

### Hydration

- Continue drinking at least eight 8 ounce glasses of water or provider-recommended amount

### Dental Health

- Attend dental appointments as recommended

### Activity

- Maintain adequate activity restrictions
- Do not lift anything heavy
- Wear flat shoes to decrease chances of falls

### Support System

- Consider places of worship, friends and family

### Rest

- Try to get 6-8 hours of sleep per night and use pillows as needed. Try to go to sleep at the same time every night

## Need for Change

### Slight Headache

- Monitor for fetal movement
- Relax
- Increase fluids
- Go into a dark room

### Urinary Tract Infection

- Call OB

### Braxton Hicks Contractions Experienced<sup>1</sup>

- Drink at least eight 8 ounce glasses of water or provider-recommended amount
- Urinate as needed, holding your urine may cause contractions
- Elevate legs

### Swollen Ankles and Feet

- Monitor blood pressure if machine is provided by provider and attend all OB appointments
- Monitor salt intake
- Wear shoes that are comfortable and do not restrict feet
- Increase to at least eight 8 ounce glasses of water or provider-recommended amount

### Increased Stress Level

- Talk to your provider
- Seek a counselor to learn ways to reduce stress
- Spend time with social groups
- Discuss things that you may be worried about with people you trust
- Ask for help if needed

## Get Medical Help

### For all items listed above you should:

- Call OB/Certified Nurse Midwife (CNM) immediately
- Be prepared to go to the hospital
- Call support person
- After calling the doctor: sit down, take a few calm cleansing breaths, and try to relax



## References:

<sup>1</sup>Braxton Hicks contractions are the body's way of preparing for true labor, but they do not indicate that labor has begun or is going to start.

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK470546/>

<https://www.nichd.nih.gov/health/topics/preterm>

<https://www.womenshealth.gov/pregnancy/youre-pregnant-now-what/pregnancy-complications/#2>

## Useful Resources from the March of Dimes:

<https://www.marchofdimes.org/complications/signs-and-symptoms-of-preterm-labor-infographic.aspx>

<https://www.marchofdimes.org/complications/preeclampsia.aspx>

<https://www.marchofdimes.org/complications/signs-and-symptoms-of-preterm-labor.aspx>

<https://www.marchofdimes.org/pregnancy/contractions.aspx>

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**Español (Spanish): ATENCIÓN:** si habla español, tiene a su disposición servicios gratuitos de asistencia lingüística. Llame al 1.800.859.9889 (TTY: 711).

**Português (Portuguese): ATENÇÃO:** Se fala português, encontram-se disponíveis serviços linguísticos, grátis. Ligue para 1.800.859.9889 (TTY: 711).