

### **What is preterm labour?**

A normal pregnancy should last between 37 and 42 weeks. Labour before the 37th week of pregnancy is known as preterm labour.

Some women who experience preterm labour will stop contracting and continue on in their pregnancy. Others will continue in labour and give birth to a preterm baby. Many advances in the care of preterm babies have improved both their survival rates, and their long-term health and well-being.

The most important way that we can help improve outcomes for preterm babies is ensure that they are born in the appropriate hospital with the right specialists on hand. It is therefore very important to identify preterm labour as early as possible.

### **What risk factors place me at a higher risk for preterm labour?**

Certain factors may increase a woman's risk of having preterm labour. However, the specific causes are not always known and having a risk factor does not mean a woman will experience preterm labour. A woman may also experience preterm labour even though she has no risk factors. Whether or not you have a risk factor for preterm labour, it's important to know the signs and symptoms of preterm labour and what to do if they occur.

#### **Women are at greatest risk for preterm labour if:**

- They are pregnant with more than 1 baby
- They have had a previous preterm birth
- They have certain uterine or cervical abnormalities

#### **Other risk factors include:**

- Urinary tract infections, vaginal infections, and sexually transmitted infections
- Infection with fever during pregnancy
- Unexplained vaginal bleeding after 20 weeks of pregnancy
- Chronic illness such as high blood pressure, kidney disease or diabetes
- Multiple first trimester, or one or more second trimester miscarriages
- Underweight or overweight before pregnancy
- Clotting Disorder (thrombophilia)
- Being Pregnant with a single fetus after in vitro fertilization (IVF)
- Short time between pregnancies
- Little or no prenatal care
- Smoking
- Drinking alcohol
- Using street drugs
- Domestic violence, including physical, sexual or emotional abuse
- Lack of social support
- High levels of stress
- Low income
- Long working hours with long periods of standing

### **What are warning signs of preterm labour?**

It is very important to diagnose preterm labour early, so knowing the warning signs and calling your midwife if you suspect you are having preterm labour is the the best way to ensure that you and your baby get appropriate care. Signs and symptoms of preterm labour include:

- Regular, menstrual-like cramping that is timeable and regular, and is increasing in length, strength and frequency.
- Watery fluid leaking from your vagina that is different from the normal increased discharge of pregnancy

(this could indicate that your bag of water is broken)

- Low, dull backache felt below the waistline that may come and go or be constant and is new and different from the backache many women experience later in pregnancy
- Significantly increased pelvic pressure that feels like your baby is pushing down
- Bloody vaginal discharge (this can be normal following intercourse)

### **What should I do if I think I am experiencing preterm labour?**

Sometimes being overtired or dehydrated can cause your uterus to become “irritable” or “crampy”, especially later in pregnancy. If you are experiencing menstrual-like cramping, you should rest and hydrate yourself.

**If rest and hydration do not decrease the cramping, and it is becoming timeable and regular, PAGE YOUR MIDWIFE.**

