

SELF-MONITORING CONTRACTIONS

It's often recommended that mothers at risk for preterm birth self-monitor contractions for at least one full hour each morning and again in the evening. Self-monitoring contractions means feeling your abdomen to see if you are having uterine contractions and then timing the contractions if you do.

Your doctor will tell you when and how often to monitor your contractions. Monitoring contractions includes measuring how long they last, how far apart they are, and how many you have in an hour. Do not trust your memory or guess. If you get upset during the process, you may not be able to remember. Therefore, have pen and paper handy and a clock or watch with a second hand.

Steps for self-monitoring contractions:

- 1) Empty your bladder to relieve any pressure on your uterus.
- 2) Drink one to two 8-ounce glasses of water; dehydration increases the level of the hormones that can lead to contractions.
- 3) Lie down on your left side with a pillow at your back. Don't lay on your back. It can cause contractions to happen more often.
- 4) Place your fingertips wide apart on the top of your uterus, up near your breastbone. Press in lightly and feel for a tightening inside your abdomen.

What will I feel with my hands and fingers?

Contractions usually begin at the top of the uterus and feel like a tightening or hardening of a muscle. Your uterus will get harder as the tightness increases to a peak. Then the uterus relaxes or softens as the contraction ends. If, with your fingertips, you feel your abdomen tighten (contract) and get hard and then relax and soften, you are having a contraction. Also, you may be able to see your abdomen move as it tightens.

When the uterus contracts, it will feel hard to your fingertips — like your biceps feel when you “make a muscle” in your arm. With a contraction, your whole uterus should feel hard. So spread out your fingers so you can feel a large area. If you feel a hard “spot” it may be your baby's buttocks or a foot — not a contraction.

Timing contractions

Each time you have a contraction, count how many seconds it lasts. When it's over, write down the time and how many seconds the contraction lasted. If you have more than four contractions in one hour, empty your bladder again, drink at least two 8-ounce glasses of water, and monitor for a second hour. If the contractions start coming closer together or become painful, call your doctor.

How long do contractions last?

The length of a contraction is usually measured in seconds. Begin counting the seconds when the contraction begins (the uterus starts getting hard) and stop counting when the contraction stops (the uterus is soft and has completely relaxed). If you don't have a watch with a second hand, count “one-thousand-one, one-thousand-two, one-thousand-three”. If you count to one-thousand-ten, and the contraction stops, the contraction lasted about ten seconds.

How far apart are contractions?

The time between contractions is measured in minutes. The time between the beginning of one contraction to the beginning of the next is “how far apart” your contractions are. For example, if your first contraction begins at 9:00 and the next begins at 9:15, your contractions are 15 minutes apart. If contractions begin at 9:00, 9:15, 9:30, 9:45, and 10:00, you have had four contractions in one hour. The contractions are also “regular” because they happened every 15 minutes.



NOTE: use the chart on the back of this sheet to help monitor your contractions.

