

# Advice for mothers who are at risk of early birth

## Information leaflet

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Most mothers with risk factors for preterm birth do not have their babies early. Babies born early have better outcomes if mothers come to hospital quickly if they have any symptoms. This leaflet provides information and advice about the signs of preterm labour, what to do if you develop any of these symptoms during pregnancy and why it is important to get help as quickly as possible. Every pregnancy is different, and you may have one or more of these symptoms.

**Remember asking for help is never a waste of our time.**



## Signs and symptoms of preterm labour or late miscarriage

### Vaginal bleeding

Bleeding from the vagina is never normal during pregnancy. Any bleeding including small spots of blood could be a sign of preterm labour.

### Vaginal “Show” or mucus plug

During pregnancy a small mucus plug sits in the cervix. This mucus may be passed from the vagina as a sign of preterm labour. This can be clear, pink, brown or bloodstained.

### Changes to vaginal discharge

Vaginal discharge may still be the same colour or consistency but may be increased in quantity or may be runnier than usual. Any change to vaginal discharge may be a sign of early preterm labour.

### Pressure in the vagina

If labour is starting, the baby may be sitting very low down in the womb and pressing on the cervix. This can be felt as pressure in the vagina or pain in the groin and thigh area.

### Abdominal or back pain or pressure

Lower abdominal (tummy) pain or pressure can be a sign of labour. This may be pain that comes and goes, or it may be constant. It may feel like period pain or worse.

Contractions or tightenings that are painful and/or are in a regular pattern (e.g. every 10 or 15 minutes, or more often) can also be a sign of labour.

Lower back pain or pressure that is not normal for you, or constant backache that does not go away with rest or paracetamol, may be a sign of labour.

### Fluid gush or trickle from the vagina

Any water from the vagina may be your waters breaking and this may be a sign of labour. This may happen as a large gush or a slow trickle of water which may be clear, pink stained, yellow or green.

## What to do if you have any of these signs or symptoms

Please call:

**Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh** – phone Triage and Assessment ☎ **0131 242 2657**

**St John's Hospital, Livingston** – phone Labour Ward ☎ **01506 524125**

You should call the hospital as soon as possible and speak to a midwife. Let them know that you are concerned about symptoms of preterm labour. They will advise you to attend hospital straightaway. Sometimes the phone lines can be busy. If you cannot get through on the telephone you should make your way into the hospital. If you can, keep trying to phone whilst travelling to the hospital to let staff know you are on your way. Staff can then prepare for your arrival.

## Why it is important to get help quickly?

If you are in preterm labour, your health and that of your baby may be at risk. The good news is that if you seek help quickly, your clinical team can help to reduce complications and can prepare your baby for the best start, even from before birth.

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You will be assessed for pain, contractions, and for signs of infection and of pre-eclampsia. You may be examined to see if your waters have broken and if the neck of your womb has started to dilate. Your baby's heart rate and position in the womb will be checked, and you may have a scan of your baby.

## What happens if I am in labour?

The team may find that you are in labour, at risk of going into labour, or that you need to have an early birth because of pre-eclampsia. If so, you will be offered a discussion with the perinatal team which includes your midwife, obstetrician and the neonatal team. They will be able to:

- Talk about your choices
- Provide information about the birth and your baby
- Answer your questions

If you are under 22 weeks gestation, only comfort care will be offered as babies at this stage cannot survive outside the womb for more than a few minutes or hours.

If you are at least 22 weeks gestation you may receive additional care or treatment to prepare your preterm baby for the very best chance in life. This additional care for your baby is called the Preterm Perinatal Package. It includes several key elements which can be delivered before and after your baby is born. This care will be planned with you by your obstetrician, midwife and the neonatal team.

**The earlier the Preterm Perinatal Package is started, the more benefit it is for your baby.**

For more advice for mothers at risk of early birth and information about the Preterm Wellbeing Pathway, please scan the QR code to visit our website:

[services.nhslothian.scot/maternity/signs-of-an-early-birth-advice-for-mothers](https://services.nhslothian.scot/maternity/signs-of-an-early-birth-advice-for-mothers)

