

- certain tests are carried out to determine this and monitor the well-being of your baby.
- sometimes women are given medication to attempt to stop the labour and/or medication to prevent infection to the baby.

If you are going into premature labour before 34 weeks you may be given two injections (steroids) that will help:

- mature your baby’s lungs so that baby is better able to breathe better after the birth.
- this treatment takes about 48 hours to work.

Sometimes you need to stay in hospital for more observations and treatment.

What if I don’t go into labour?

You are likely to be able to go home. You will be offered a follow-up appointment with your midwife or a specialist doctor depending on your individual circumstances.

If your waters have broken but you aren’t in labour, you will be asked to return to the hospital for regular check-ups.

Also you might be started on antibiotics to prevent infection.

More Information:

Premature labour and birth—Health Navigator



<https://www.healthnavigator.org.nz/healthy-living/p/premature-labour-and-birth/>

Signs of premature labour - Tommy’s



<https://www.tommys.org/pregnancy-information/pregnancy-complications/premature-birth/signs-premature-labour>

	Department: Women’s Health	Updated: Jan. 2020
	Approved by: Chief Midwife	Review: Jan. 2023
	Owner: Midwife Educator	

Premature Labour What to do? Signs and Prevention

Information for Pregnant Women and Whanau

When your labour starts before 37 weeks of pregnancy

This is called premature labour (or preterm labour). The reason why it happens is not always well known.

Even if you are healthy and do “all the right things”, there is still a chance that premature labour can happen to you.

If you have had a previous premature birth, let your midwife know early as sometimes there are things that can be done to reduce the chance of it happening again.

Can premature labour be prevented?

If your care team thinks you may be at risk of premature labour, there are treatments that can help to prevent or delay this.

Which treatment is right for you will depend on your particular circumstances.

- You may require additional scans (ultrasounds) organising from 14 weeks of pregnancy to check the length of your cervix (neck of the womb).
- Talk to your midwife or GP about the possibility of having vaginal swabs and urine test to check for infections. Sometimes infection can lead to premature labour.

What are the signs of possible premature labour?

Premature labour can happen quickly and it is best to delivery in hospital as your baby is very likely need special care right away.

If your experience any sign of premature labour it is important to contact your midwife urgently, or call the hospital.

Signs of premature labour:

- any loss of water or trickle of fluids, increased vaginal discharge like mucous or blood from the vagina
- you are having abdominal cramps, pelvic pressure and lower backache, menstrual like cramps (as if you are getting your period)
- feeling that baby is pushing down, pain or pressure in the belly
- or the feeling that something is ‘not right’

What can you do to reduce the chance of having a premature labour and birth?

Even though it is not possible to prevent all premature labour and birth, there is still much you can do to help your baby being born at the right time.

- **Start pregnancy care** (antenatal visits) as early as possible with you midwife or GP and attend your routine antenatal visits
- **Quit smoking.** Get a referral to The Quit

Group 0800 778 778 or talk to your midwife or GP about it.

- Enrol in **pregnancy and parenting education**
- **Reduce stress** where possible, avoid working long hours and strenuous work
- If you need **support** dealing with drugs, alcohol, or violence issues talk to your midwife or GP about it
- **Eating a healthy diet** –ask your midwife or GP about it and follow ‘NZ Food and Nutrition Guideline for Pregnancy’.
- Let your midwife or GP know if you had **previous uterine surgery** (operation on your womb), Abortion (TOP) or curettage (ERPOC).

Risks for your baby

A baby who is born premature may need special care. This could mean that your baby may need specialist care in the hospital and could stay in hospital after you have gone home.

In general, the earlier a baby is born, the greater their chance of health problems at birth and later in life. Some babies are not strong enough to survive.

What checks will be done in hospital?

If you think you are in premature labour you midwife will send you to the hospital for further checks. You will be:

- seen first by a midwife then a doctor who will assess whether you are in premature labour or not.