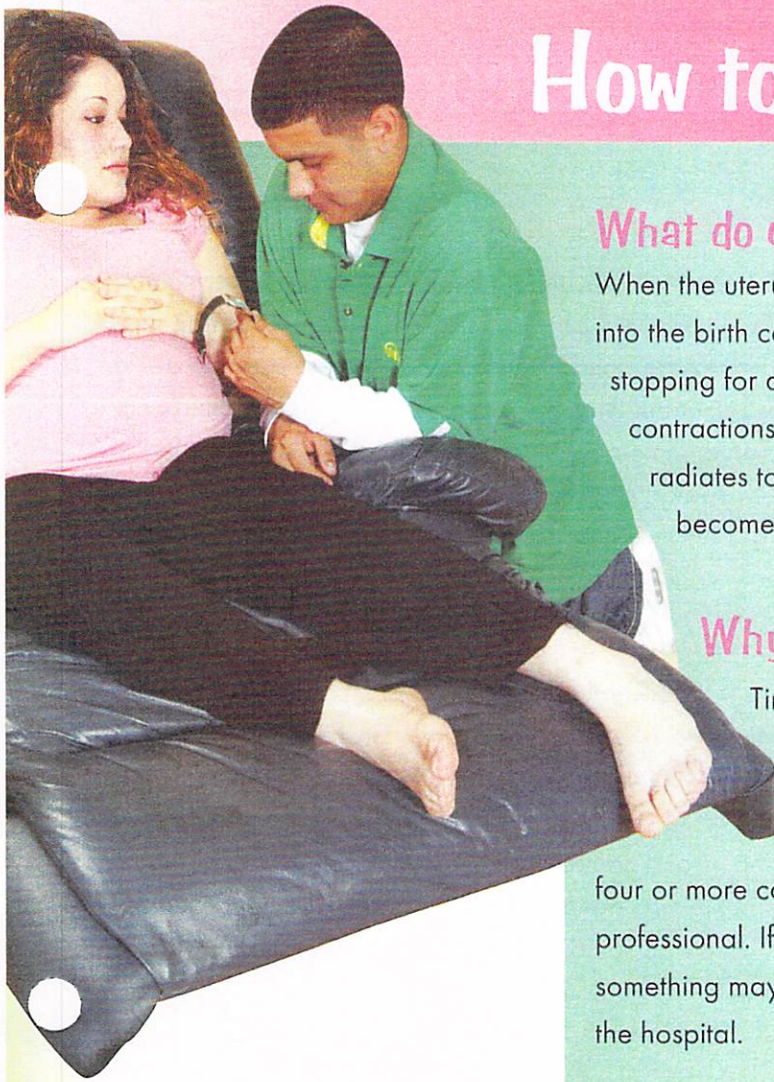


# How to Time Contractions



## What do contractions do?

When the uterus contracts, the cervix opens, allowing the baby to move into the birth canal. Contractions build to a peak and gradually fade before stopping for a short time to allow the uterus to rest. Many women say contractions initially feel like menstrual cramps or a lower backache that radiates toward the abdomen. As labor progresses, these sensations become more intense.

## Why should I time contractions?

Timing contractions helps you know when to contact your healthcare professional. During a prenatal appointment, you and your healthcare professional should decide when you will go to the hospital or birth center. If you experience four or more contractions an hour before 37 weeks, call your healthcare professional. If you are confused about what you are feeling or suspect something may be wrong, call your healthcare professional or go to the hospital.

## When should I call my healthcare professional or go to the hospital or birth center?

Women generally can labor at home until contractions:

- Total at least 12-15 an hour
- Average 1 minute in duration, are about 5 minutes apart in frequency, and are consistent for 1 hour
- Are strong enough to require comfort measures such as breathing techniques

## How do I time contractions?

- Use a watch or clock with a second hand.
- Write down the time each contraction starts and stops.
- Note the number of seconds each contraction lasts (duration).
- Note the number of minutes from the beginning of one contraction to the beginning of another (frequency/interval).
- Time contractions for 30-60 minutes, and evaluate their duration and frequency. See the section at left to help you decide whether it is time to go to the hospital or birth center.
- If you have decided not to go to the hospital or birth center, resume timing contractions when their duration, frequency, or strength changes.

