

## **Preterm Labor Precautions**

### **Uterine Activity**

The uterus contracts throughout pregnancy. During early pregnancy, contractions are of long duration and low intensity, usually not appreciated by the pregnant woman. In the second trimester, and particularly in the third trimester, the nature of uterine contractions change. The duration becomes shorter, and the intensity greater. The character of these contractions may vary with each individual. Lower abdominal pressure, back pain, cramping, uterine tightening, or feeling that the baby is "balling up" may all represent contractions. If these sensations are periodic (short duration that tend to recur or "come and go"), they may represent uterine contractions. The normal or baseline number of uterine contractions is usually 1-2 per hour in the third trimester of pregnancy. Many women will experience uterine contractions periodically throughout the day with increased frequency typically in the evening. If the contractions occur at the frequency of four or more per hour and persist for greater than one hour, the diagnosis of preterm labor may be considered.

### **Vaginal Discharge**

Vaginal and cervical secretions are normally increased during pregnancy. It is not uncommon to have further increase in vaginal secretions prior to the onset of labor. A change in vaginal discharge, with or without uterine activity should prompt your contracting our office for evaluation.

### **Vaginal Bleeding**

Vaginal spotting or bleeding may occur in association with preterm labor. Vaginal spotting or bleeding is not considered normal and should prompt your contacting our office for evaluation.

### **Leakage of Fluid**

In most instances, rupture of membranes is associated with leakage or "gush" of a large amount of clear fluid. Leakage of small amount of fluid from the vaginal may be associated with several situations, including increased normal vaginal discharge, leakage of urine, or ruptured membranes. Leakage of fluid for the vagina requires further evaluation.