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HOW TO...

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## False vs actual labour pain: How to know the difference

Braxton Hicks contractions or false labour are common in the second or third trimester and it is a way for the uterus to prepare itself for a pregnancy

**Written by Swathy R Iyer** 

With quotes from Dr Subhashini Y (obstetrician), Dr Anusha Rao P (obstetrician)

**VIDEOS** 



A mild, but frequent discomfort that expectant mothers face during the late second and third trimesters can be confusing. Braxton Hicks contractions, also known as false labour, are associated with uncomfortable, mild contractions of the uterus. Doctors say it is common and is a natural way for your body to prepare itself.

Knowing what Braxton Hicks contractions feel like and learning how to tell them apart from true labour pains can be helpful for an expectant mother, say gynaecologists.

Anju V, an IT professional from Kochi, Kerala, who experienced Braxton Hicks contractions during the early third trimester of her pregnancy says that for her, the pain associated with it felt a lot like the cramps she experiences while menstruating. "The pains felt uncomfortable and physically, my belly felt taut or hard to touch," she says.

Dr Subhashini Y, consultant, obstetrics, Fernandez Hospital, Hyderabad says Braxton Hicks contractions can feel like mild menstrual cramps and may cause some discomfort to some women.

## What are Braxton Hicks contractions?

Dr Anusha Rao P, consultant, obstetrics and gynaecology, Yashoda Hospitals, Hyderabad says that Braxton Hicks contractions are false labour pains. "These contractions are generally mild tightening of the uterus," she says, adding that they are "a way for the uterus to prepare itself for childbirth. It is increasingly seen in the late second trimester or during the third trimester."

"Braxton Hicks are simply sporadic contractions and relaxation of the uterine muscle. They do not increase in intensity or frequency and taper off and then disappear altogether with a change of position or rest," says Dr Subhashini.

Dr Subhashini says that some of the most common signs of false labour include an irregular, non-rhythmic, painless, tightening of the baby bump without the changes in the birth canal. "Braxton Hicks contractions are a usual part of pregnancy. They may be uncomfortable, but they are not usually painful," she says.



## Dr Subhashini says that while Braxton Hicks contractions are irregular, unpredictable and never get intensely painful, real labour

contractions will feel more painful and get closer together in intervals. "While Braxton Hicks contractions come and go at random intervals, real labour contractions will come at more regular intervals and last

closer to 60 seconds in each contraction," she says.

The doctor adds that while false labour pains may ease up, nothing you do will help true contractions subside. "Even talking or walking

becomes difficult," she adds. Dr Rao says that one can get relief from false labour through painkillers, based on a doctor's advice, and proper rest.

Dr Rao says that Braxton Hicks in most cases, is felt in front of the abdomen. Whereas, true labour pains can be felt more at the lower

abdomen, radiating to the lower back and thighs. Experts say that the pain associated with false labour may feel different for different women and not all women experience it. When it comes to labour pains, once they begin, they only increase in frequency and intensity, says Dr Rao, adding that painkillers usually

do not help when it comes to relieving true labour pains. "True labour pains are also accompanied by cervical changes- softening of the cervix, leaking or bleeding pelvis," she says.

Dr Subhashini says that some definite signs of true labour include:

Decreased foetal movements

Bloody mucus discharge

Increasing rhythmic contractions which radiate to the back and increase pressure in the pelvis.

Water breaks

- Should you visit a hospital?

some women. It is a usual part of pregnancy and is a way for the uterus to prepare itself.

## Dr Subhashini says that if the pain or discomfort associated with Braxton Hicks contractions do not ease with measures such as taking a walk or drinking water, emptying your bladder etc, or if the contractions continue and are becoming more frequent or more intense, then it is advised to contact your healthcare provider.

**Takeaways** Braxton Hicks, also known as false labour, are irregular contractions, mild tightening of the uterus and feel like menstrual cramps for





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