# ARTICLE NAME: Did my water break?

# Header

Did my water just break?

**Blurb**

Urine or other vaginal fluids is often mistaken for leaking amniotic fluid. We asked two midwifes to give us the low down on water breaking signs.

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If you are worried about a public display of water works in the cereal aisle, you’ll be glad to know that contrary to believe, your water isn’t likely to break before labour begins. “More than 85% of women enter the birthing room, with their membranes fully intact. And even if you end up being among the 15% who do spring a pre-labour leak, you won’t have to fear a public puddle at your feet. Unless you’re lying down, something you probably don’t do much in public anyway, amniotic fluid is less likely to go with the flow, and more likely to come out as a slow trickle – or at most a small gush,” writes Heidi Murkoff and Sharon Mazel in the 4th Edition of What to Expect when you’re expecting. We asked private practising midwifes Marilyn Sher and Jeanell Du Plessis to give us the low down on what women can expect when their waters do break.

**What exactly is my “water”?**

Your baby is surrounded by amniotic fluid during pregnancy, which protects the two of you from infections and cushions your little one in your tummy. Towards the end of your pregnancy this bag of water will usually break before labour starts. (this last sentence is contradictory to what you have said above and is not true as the rest of the article states)

**How will I know my water has broken?**

Your water can either break in a huge big gush making everything wet or it could come in a constant trickle. While the big gush is easy to see, the trickle is harder to identify. “Some women have an increase in clear vaginal discharges during their pregnancy as a result of all the hormonal changes while certain vaginal infections also cause a vaginal discharge. Both these discharges can be mistaken for waters breaking,” says Jeanell. Some moms can also have urine leaking due to the baby pressing down on the bladder, which can also easily be mistaken as waters breaking. If you are uncertain about whether it is just a vaginal infection, urine leaking or possibly your water that has broken, contact your health care provider so she can check if everything is in order.

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**Signs that my water has broken**

* When your waters break, it should be clear and watery. It can sometimes be mixed with a little bloody mucus, making the discharge slightly pink.
* If your waters did break, often you’ll experience a constant flow of water – more when you are moving, standing up or after a contraction. This is normal.

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**If my waters break does that mean I’m in labour?**

If you are full term with your pregnancy, your baby will most likely be born within the next 72 hours, depending on whether you opt to have a normal vaginal delivery or a C-section. “You can go into labour spontaneously immediately when your waters break, or your contractions could only start a couple of hours after your waters have broken,” explains Jeanell. If you are preterm, your gynaecologist will probably prescribe antibiotics and steroids to help your baby’s lungs mature. Your doctor might even try to stop your contractions and delay labour so the steroids have enough time to work effectively.

**Do I have to go to hospital immediately?**

It will depend on your situation. “If you don’t have pain, you don’t have to go to hospital immediately, but if you are experiencing pain you should get to the hospital as soon as possible,” says Marliyn. Jeanell adds that if you are 37 or more weeks pregnant, planning to have a normal vaginal delivery and don’t have a high risk pregnancy, you don’t have to go to hospital immediately, but you should, however, let your care giver know that your waters have broken. If your waters have been broken for more than 12 hours and you haven’t gone into spontaneous labour your doctor or midwife might suggest inducing labour. If you are less than 37 weeks pregnant, planning to have an elective C-section or have a high risk pregnancy (a multiple pregnancy or if baby is breech), you should get to the hospital as soon as possible.

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**Signs of labour**

* A slightly bloody mucus discharge.
* Contractions. These might start off as irregular, period like pains that comes and goes, but will eventually get longer and stronger and closer together.

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**When will my waters have to be broken artificially?**

Marilyn explains that your water (amniotic fluid) is there to protect you and your baby from infections and to cushion your baby’s head. They should therefore stay intact until your baby is born or rupture on their own. “We know that breaking your water causes the release of a hormone that makes your contractions stronger and pushes the baby’s head into your cervix and also helps you to dilate quicker.” It may, however, be necessary to rupture your membranes as a means to start labour or to speed up the labour process if you are already in labour.

**When will my contractions start (before or after my waters break)?**

Jeanell says contractions normally start before your waters break. Only in about 5% of pregnancies do the membranes rupture before the contractions have started.

**How do I know if I’m having contractions or just Braxton Hicks?**

“Braxton Hicks are described as painless contractions, but you do feel your uterus go hard and they can be uncomfortable, especially if you have had more than one baby,” says Marilyn. They also usually go away when you take a warm bath and rest. Jeanell adds that Braxton Hicks contractions are irregular and they don’t increase in intensity. Labour contractions on the other hand are regular and they can be timed from the start of one contraction to the start of the next one. “The time in between contractions is regular and contractions become closer together as labour progresses. Labour contractions also increase in intensity and they stay there, nothing you do (such as taking a hot bath or rest) will make them go away.”

**Water breaking tips**

* Don’t panic.
* Inform your doctor or midwife or the maternity ward where you are planning to deliver your baby if your waters break so they can tell you what the next step is.
* Ask your doctor or midwife beforehand what they suggest you do when your waters do break.
* Make sure that you your health care provider’s numbers as well as the maternity ward’s number where you are planning to deliver your baby is saved on your phone and written down in a safe place.
* Familiarize yourself with the signs of what to look out for when your waters break and when you should be concerned.
* Make sure you have some maternity pads on hand. Once your waters have broken, it can drain continuously.
* Remember you are more likely to start having contractions before your waters break, so don’t let the thought of having your waters breaking in public keep you from enjoying your pregnancy.