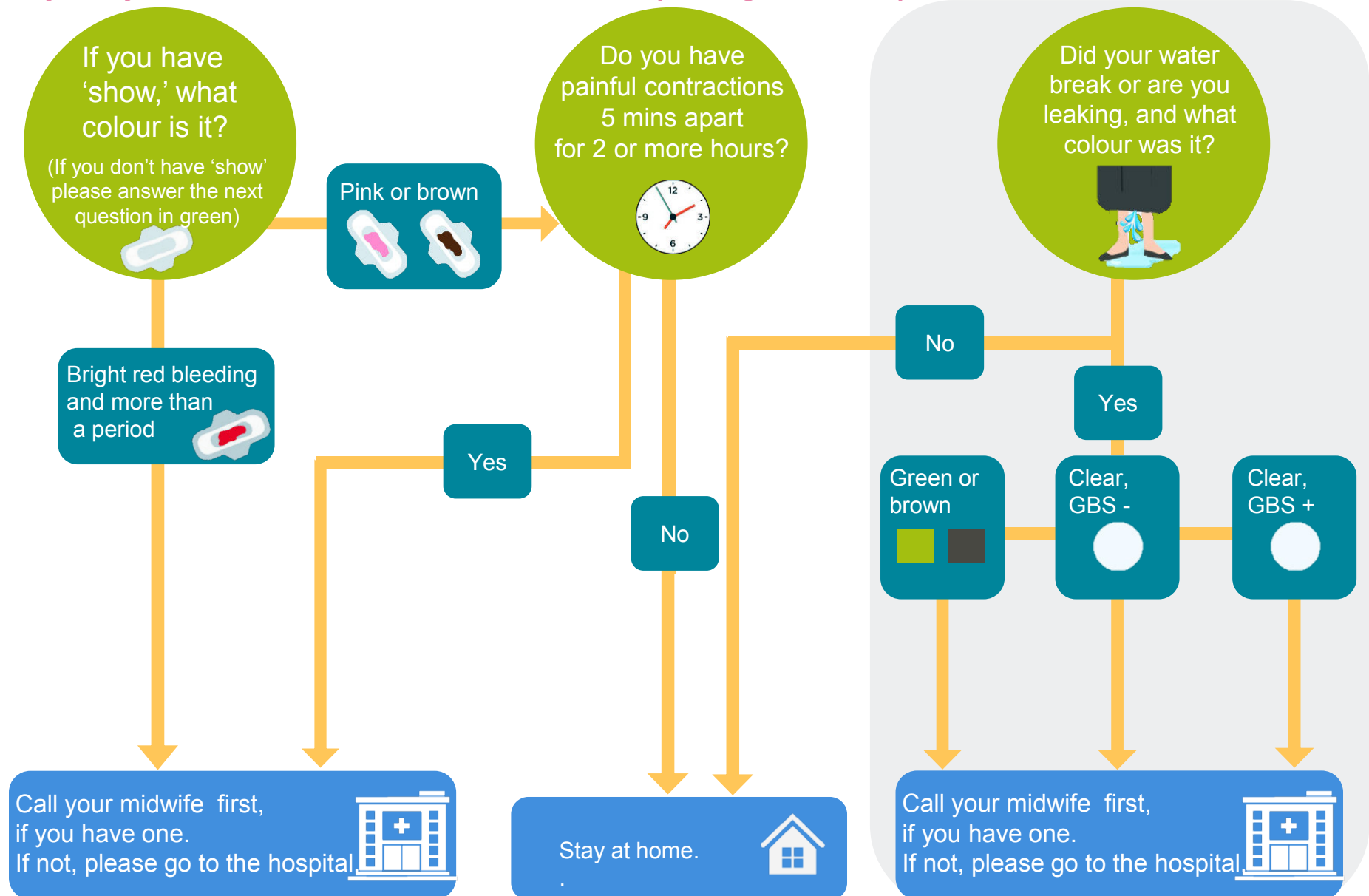


What do I do when labour starts?

Please note: If this is not your first baby and you feel your contractions are getting stronger or closer together, come to the Assessment Room (room 2S-177) inside the Labour and Delivery unit at the hospital.

If at any time you are concerned and want to be assessed, please go to the hospital.



What is early labour?

It is when irregular contractions begin to occur, and your cervix softens, shortens and prepares to open. Early labour can be managed at home and there is no need to come to the hospital right away unless you have bright red bleeding, have broken your water, cannot manage the pain, or you have concerns. If you go to the hospital to be assessed, there is still a good chance you will be sent home again until active labour begins. Remember, even if you plan to have an epidural once you are in active labour, you will still need to learn how to manage discomfort during early labour.

Early labour can last many hours and is a normal part of the birthing process.

WHAT DOES EARLY LABOUR FEEL LIKE?

- Contractions are mild to moderate, lasting 30-45 seconds and often irregular
- You may have backache or cramping
- You may have heavy vaginal discharge with blood or mucous
- Your waters may break in a gush or slow leak
- You may have stomach upset (such as nausea, vomiting, diarrhea)
- You may have difficulty sleeping or be emotional

Once you are in **active labour** you should come to the hospital. Most of you having your first baby will not be in active labour until:

- Your contractions are regular, strong and painful. Strong contractions take your full attention. You cannot talk through them, and
- Contractions are 4-5 minutes apart and last 45-90 seconds, and
- This pattern has been going on for 2 hours

WHAT CAN I DO FOR COMFORT IN EARLY LABOUR?

- Talk to your partner or support person and let them know you are in early labour
- Eat light meals if you are hungry
- Drink plenty of fluids
- Breathe slowly through contractions
- Have a shower or bath
- Change position often (see below)
- Apply heat to your lower back
- Try a massage
- Try distracting yourself with an activity you enjoy
- Take a Tylenol and a Gravol and try to sleep
- Ask your support person to give you reassurance, feedback, and make suggestions

WHAT CAN I DO IF I NEED MORE HELP COPING WITH CONTRACTIONS?

- Call your doula (if you have one) and have your partner or support person stay with you
- Follow the advice of your doctor or midwife about how to seek help. Call your midwife if you have one, otherwise go to the Assessment room at the hospital.
- Visit the hospital for assessment, information and support—the hospital staff may advise you to go home and return later

WHEN TO GO TO THE HOSPITAL –

SEE DECISION TREE “WHAT DO I DO WHEN LABOUR STARTS?”

- If you have bleeding that is a bright red colour or more than a period
- If your water breaks or you are leaking, call your midwife if you have one or go to the hospital if you do not have a midwife
- If you have painful contractions that have been 5 minutes apart for 2 hours and you are having trouble coping at home, call your midwife if you have one or go to the hospital if you do not have a midwife
- If you have any concerns call your midwife if you have one or go to the hospital if you do not have a midwife.



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