Ready, Set, Not Yet:
Help for Early Labor
The last weeks of pregnancy sometimes seem to go on forever. You may have contractions at times that make you wonder if this could be “it”. Contractions may stop or your labor may be in its early stages. It’s frustrating to go to the hospital with these labor pains, only to be sent home without a baby in your arms.

This pre-labor period is helping your body get ready for the big day. We recommend that this early pre-labor period is best spent in places you find comfortable.

It is sometimes difficult to tell if you’re in true labor. If you go to the hospital for a labor check, here is what to expect. You will go to the triage area. An experienced Labor and Delivery nurse will place you on a fetal monitor to evaluate your baby as well as your labor pattern. She will talk to you and determine whether you are in early or active labor.

You are considered to be in active labor when your cervix is dilated three centimeters or more. If you are in active labor, chances are you will be admitted to the labor room. If you are dilated less than three centimeters, you may still be in the early phase of labor, and you may be asked to walk for a little while. After a period of time, you will be asked to return to the triage nurse to be re-evaluated. The triage nurse will talk to your physician to determine if you will be admitted or sent home.

When should you go to the hospital?
Go to the birthing area of the hospital if you have any of the following conditions:
- Anytime you have bright red vaginal bleeding.
- When your water breaks or if you notice a leaking of fluids or wetness in your underwear.
- When you are having strong contractions every 5-10 minutes, with each contraction lasting at least 60 seconds, for one hour.

Remember to ask your healthcare provider for specific instructions about when he or she should be called and under what conditions.

Staying comfortable
Whether you are walking around your house or the hallways in the hospital, the last hours, days or weeks of your pregnancy can be a difficult time. Here are some tips to help keep you comfortable throughout this time, whether you are in early labor or just feeling uncomfortable.

If labor has stopped or slowed down:
- Sleep or just rest.
- Be close to sympathetic, loving people; get a hug.
- Get a foot, hand, back or shoulder massage.
- Go to your favorite room in your home and slowly relax each part of your body; listen to relaxing music.

- Drink clear liquids such as energy beverages, water or apple juice.
- Go for a short walk, shopping or to a movie.

As contractions get stronger, here are some tips for coping with labor:
- Rock in a rocking chair.
- Take a shower or a bath.
- Relax between contractions; take deep, slow breaths; change positions often.
- Dance slowly.
- Call your labor coach; find someone to tell you what a good job you are doing; hold hands with someone you love.
- Use lip balm on dry lips; suck on a sour lollipop or popsicle.
- Pray.
- Tell jokes; listen to jokes.
- Cool yourself with a washcloth dipped in ice water.
- Use the bathroom often.
- For lower backache, try ice packs or heat, or switch between hot and cold. Use tennis balls or a rolling pin under your pelvis for counter pressure; move your pelvis.