Preterm labor guidelines
Preterm labor and birth cannot always be avoided, but if you follow these guidelines, you can reduce the chances of your baby being born early.

• Visit your doctor or nurse midwife for regularly scheduled visits.
• Drink at least two quarts of caffeine-free liquid each day.
• Rest and relax on your side each day.
• Avoid hard activities like heavy lifting, furniture moving, and some forms of exercise.
• Tell your doctor or nurse midwife about the kind of work you do, what your duties are, stressful situations, long hours, etc.
• Try to decrease or eliminate stressful situations.
• Find people who can be your support system — family, friends, or neighbors who are close by and can help if you are tired or sick or need to get to the doctor or hospital.
• Avoid nipple preparation for breast feeding.
• Cut down on or stop smoking.
• Don’t drink alcohol, including wine and beer.
• Tell your doctor or nurse midwife immediately if you think you have a vaginal or bladder infection.
• Empty your bladder, especially after sex.
• Eat a healthy diet that includes fruits, vegetables, and fiber. Also try to gain enough weight to allow your baby to grow properly.

Call your doctor or nurse midwife...
If you have vaginal bleeding or fluid leaking from your vagina, or if after an hour of rest and drinking liquids:

• You have more than six contractions in one hour
• Backache, pressure, or cramping has not stopped

If you have questions about labor, the information in this brochure, or your pregnancy, you can also contact:

Amy Rager RN BSN
OB Case Manager
970-263-5564
800-346-4643 toll free

www.rmhp.org
Labor is an exciting time. It means your baby is coming after nine months of waiting. But sometimes women go into labor three or more weeks before their due date. This is called premature or preterm labor. Babies born early — before 37 weeks of pregnancy — may have problems breathing, eating, and keeping warm because they did not have enough time to grow and develop completely.

What is preterm labor?
Preterm labor is when the mother has contractions (her uterine muscles tighten) and the cervix dilates (or opens) too early. This could cause the baby to be born too early, or preterm.

What causes preterm labor?
No one really knows. There are certain things that seem to increase a woman’s chances of having preterm labor — smoking, many urinary tract infections, having twins, having preterm labor or a preterm baby with a previous pregnancy. But sometimes there are no clear reasons for preterm labor.

How can I prevent preterm labor?
The best way is to know the first signs and get care quickly if any of these signs occur.

Are you having contractions?
Preterm labor can be hard to notice, and there may not be pain. That’s why it’s important to know what contractions feel like. You can feel your abdomen for contractions.

• Lie down with a pillow behind your back so you are tilted slightly to your left side. Do not lie flat on your back.
• Place your fingers on your belly where your uterus is located, as shown in the picture above. Using your fingers, gently press down over the entire surface to feel the hardness of your uterus. When your uterus is relaxed, the area will be softer.
• If you feel your uterus get harder, you are having a contraction. Count how many minutes there are from the beginning of one contraction to the beginning of the next. Do this for one hour and if you have more than six contractions in one hour, then you may be having preterm labor.

Warning signs of preterm labor
• Contractions (your abdomen tightens like a fist) of more than six in one hour.
• A low, dull backache that is doesn’t go away when you change your position.
• Pelvic pressure that feels like the baby is pushing down.
• Change in vaginal discharge (leaking fluid or bleeding from your vagina).
• Cramps that feel like your period.
• Abdominal cramps with or without diarrhea.

What to do if you have warning signs of preterm labor
If you are experiencing any of the warning signs, try the following:

• Empty your bladder.
• Lie down on your side and rest for one hour.
• Drink three to four large glasses of water.
• Feel for uterine contractions and time them. Keep track of the minutes from the beginning of one contraction to the beginning of the next, or keep track of the number of contractions you have in one hour.

If the symptoms get worse or do not go away after one hour, call your doctor or nurse midwife.