

# healthy expectations - WEEK 32

## About Baby

At 32 weeks old, the average baby:

- Is about 17 inches long
- Weighs approximately 3 1/2 to 4 pounds
- Has softer smoother skin
- Has hair, fingernails and toenails
- Pumps about 25 quarts of blood through his/her heart per day

## About Mom

Most expectant mothers can expect to gain about a pound per week throughout the rest of their pregnancies, a large amount of which is gained by the baby. Nearly half of your baby's weight is gained during these final weeks. The blood volume of your body has also increased as much as 50 percent since the start of your pregnancy to sustain the needs of you and your baby.

You may be experiencing heartburn, shortness of breath and/or frequent stomach upset now, as your expanding uterus crowds your abdomen. One thing to watch for is the onset of lower back pain. While the pain may be due to the added weight and stress on your body, it can also be a warning sign of preterm labor and should be brought to the attention of your physician immediately.

Also, at this time, be sure to make your pre-admission appointment at the hospital.

## Managing Pain During Labor

It is personal choice as to whether or not you use pain medication during labor. Some women choose to have a completely natural childbirth, without any medication whatsoever. Others choose one of the pain relief options available - most commonly, an epidural. The length and intensity of labor varies from woman to woman and cannot be predicted, so even if you plan to have a natural childbirth, you should decide ahead of time if you will be open to using medication should the need arise. You may also want to have a written birth plan available to give to physicians and delivery staff, indicating your wishes, in the event that you're too flustered to express your preferences or unable to do so for any other reason.

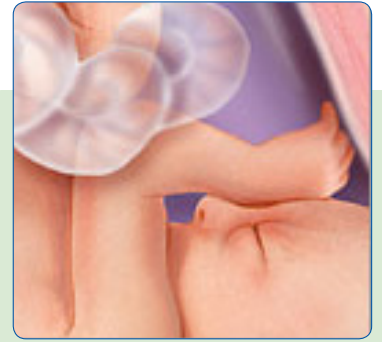
There are several options for the delivery of labor medications, including:

- Epidural
- Spinal Block A
- Combined Spinal/Epidural A, Combined Spinal/Epidural Block
- Systemic Medications

*Maureen Jordan, MD*  
*Crystal Evig, MD*  
*Alice Cole, CNM, MSN*  
Briargate Office  
2405 Research Pkwy.  
(719) 522-1135

*Judith Brinkman, MD*  
East Office  
6340 Barnes Road  
(719) 522-1135

*Michelle Covalt, MD*  
*Matthew Dunham, MD*  
*Debi Jones, NP*  
Southwest Office  
2610 Tenderfoot Hill Street  
(719) 522-1135



## Braxton Hicks Contractions

Braxton Hicks contractions can begin at any time during pregnancy and usually increase in frequency and regularity as you approach the final weeks. Though they start out relatively painless and infrequent, they can increase in intensity over time and become painful, often leading to a sense of 'false labor'.

### Easing the Symptoms

You may be able to lessen the symptoms of Braxton Hicks by:

- Taking a warm bath
- Drinking more water
- Changing your position/activity
- Relaxation/Meditation

**Contact your physician if you experience any of the following:**

- 4 or more contractions per hour
- Abdominal pain/cramping
- New lower back pain
- Pelvic pressure, like your baby is pushing downward
- Vaginal bleeding or spotting

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## Epidural

- Combination of narcotic painkillers and Local anesthetic
- Administered by a continuous feed of medication through a thin catheter, inserted into the epidural space around the lower spine
- Reduces pain and lessens sense of touch, temperature and movement
- Affects only the lower body

## Spinal Block A

- Administered by a single injection into the spinal fluid
- Eliminates pain quickly but only lasts a few hours
- Often administered late in labor when its too late for an epidural

## Combined Spinal/Epidural A or Combined Spinal/Epidural Block

- Quick and continuous pain relief
- Spinal Block offers quick relief at the start while the epidural offers continuous relief that will kick in as the spinal block wears off
- Includes initial spinal block injection with epidural catheterization

## Systemic Medications

- Narcotic painkillers
- Administered by injection into your muscle, or by IV into the bloodstream
- May be used with a tranquilizer for relaxation or to reduce nausea
- Reduces pain but does not eliminate it
- Affects entire body, not only the pelvic area
- Causes drowsiness



## Resources

[www.babycenter.com](http://www.babycenter.com)

[www.babycenter.com/calculators-birthplan](http://www.babycenter.com/calculators-birthplan)