

Induction of labour

In most pregnancies, labour will begin spontaneously between 37 and 42 weeks. Sometimes, for medical reasons it will be recommended that your labour is started artificially. If this is the case it is important that you understand the reasons for this, and the different methods of induction.

What are that ways to induce labour?

- **Sweeping the membranes** is a non-pharmacological technique that involves a vaginal examination by the midwife or doctor. Gloved fingers are inserted into the vagina to reach the cervix, a circular motion with the finger sweeps the membranes which releases hormones called prostaglandins. This is not a formal method of induction and can be offered from 40 weeks at your regular antenatal visit.
- **Synthetic Prostaglandins** such as Prostin® or Cervidil® are medications inserted in the vagina near the cervix helping to soften and open it. Some women may require one or more doses, and this may take one to two days. This requires admission to hospital overnight and sometimes multiple vaginal examinations.
- **Mechanical cervical ripening.** A speculum examination is performed to place a thin, soft tube (balloon catheter) through the opening of the cervix. At the end of the tube is a small balloon which is filled with water. The pressure from the balloon on the cervix helps it to dilate. This is normally left overnight and removed before labour begins.
- **Breaking the membranes** (called an amniotomy). You may or may not require cervical ripening as mentioned above, prior to your waters being broken. This involves a doctor or midwife performing a vaginal examination and gently puncturing the membranes using a special plastic device. This allows the amniotic fluid around the baby to be released.
- **Oxytocin Induction.** Giving a synthetic version of oxytocin called Syntocinon® through an intravenous drip (cannula) will stimulate contractions to start. The intravenous drip will start after your waters are broken. Your baby will be monitored continuously with a wireless CTG while you are in labour.

Most women require a combination of these methods to start labour. It is not uncommon to take longer than 24 hours from when you first arrive for your induction to when you meet your baby. All options for pain relief including water immersion or epidural are available to you during labour.

You will be advised by the hospital when and where to present on the day of your induction.

Please be aware that due to unforeseen circumstances your induction day and start time may need to be changed at short notice.