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Induction of Labor

Most pregnancies last about 40 weeks. Some women may deliver earlier while other women go a week or two past their due date. Anytime between 37-42 weeks is considered normal. We do not know exactly what the trigger is that starts labor. It is believed to be a signal the baby gives to Mom's body that everything is ready and it is time. The providers in our practice feel that whenever possible it is best to let nature decide when the baby will be born.

Occasionally due to illness, going too long past the due date, or other indications it becomes necessary to induce labor.

How is labor induced?

There are many ways to induce labor. The method will be chosen based on the condition of your body, the "readiness" of your cervix, your preferences and the preferences of your provider. Methods can include:

- Stripping membranes-your provider will put her/his fingers into the cervix and gently separate the bag of waters from the side of the uterus. This can cause a release of hormones that soften the cervix. It cannot be done unless the cervix is already at least 1-2cm dilated. This method is considered safe, does not involve any medications, and is effective in starting labor ~25-35% of the time.
- Prostaglandins-Prostaglandins are agents that are used to help soften or "ripen" the cervix to prepare it for labor. There are many forms of prostaglandins such as suppositories, gels, and pills.
- Pitocin-Pitocin is a synthetic version of the hormone oxytocin. Your body produces oxytocin to make the uterus contract. Infusing the synthetic Pitocin in by IV can cause contractions as well. The infusion is administered slowly to help decrease the chance of problems. It can take several hours for the levels in your body to be adequate for you to be in active labor.

If you are already in labor but progressing slowly one of the above methods may be used to help speed up the process. This is called labor augmentation.

Are there risks to induction?

Induction can increase your likelihood of having a cesarean section, especially if your cervix is not soft or ripe. Inducing labor too early can also be risky for the baby if he or she is not fully developed.



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Induction might be a good idea if you are very sick and your provider says you need to have your baby. Your baby is sick and your provider says the baby will be better off delivered. Also induction might be warranted if you are 2 or more weeks past your due date.

Induction might be a bad idea you and your baby are both healthy and you are less than 39 weeks. If your baby is not head down you should not be induced. If you have had a previous cesarean section (or other uterine surgery) you and your provider will need to discuss the risks and benefits of delivery vaginally but induction might not be safe.