Pregnancy beyond 41 weeks

INFORMATION ABOUT YOUR BIRTH OPTIONS
WHEN YOU ARE ONE WEEK PAST YOUR DUE DATE

This leaflet gives you information to assist you in making the best choice for you and your baby should your pregnancy go beyond 41 weeks, which is one week past your due date.

Discuss this with your midwife and/or doctor.

I am now 41 weeks and ‘overdue’. What are my choices?

When you became pregnant your midwife or doctor would have given you an estimated due date. This date is only an estimate. Most babies will be born within seven days either side of this date.

Not every pregnancy is the same. It is normal for different women to have shorter or longer pregnancies. In fact, about 8 in 100 women will not have gone into labour by 41 weeks. Most women will start to labour before they reach 42 weeks.

If you are still pregnant at 41 weeks, making decisions regarding your birth options should be made in partnership with your care provider. Appropriate information and support will help you make the best possible choices over a very short period of time.

Whilst there are benefits for waiting for labour to start naturally, it is recommended that induction of labour occurs before 42 weeks gestation.

Is there anything that can help me go into labour naturally?

There are some non-medical options that may encourage your labour to start. Your healthcare professional will be able to give you more information and advice.

One option that can be offered is a procedure called ‘stretch and sweep.’ This is done during a vaginal examination (internal examination). Your care provider inserts their finger into your cervix and makes circular movements around your cervix. A ‘stretch and sweep’ encourages the release of hormones that help your uterus contract. You may need to undergo this procedure more than once. A ‘stretch and sweep’ can be repeated at regular intervals until labour commences. Undergoing a ‘stretch and sweep’ does not harm you or your baby.

Benefits of ‘stretch and sweep’:
- A ‘stretch and sweep’ may increase your chance of going into spontaneous labour.
- You can have a ‘stretch and sweep’ during a pregnancy check-up and you can usually go home afterwards.

Disadvantages of ‘stretch and sweep’:
- The procedure can be uncomfortable with some women finding it slightly painful.
- A small amount of vaginal bleeding or spotting can happen after the procedure along with some irregular contractions. If you are concerned please contact your midwife or the Delivery Suite on 02 9382 6100.
- It may not start your labour.

What if I wait for labour to start naturally?

The benefits of waiting for labour to start naturally may include:
- Less likelihood of interventions such as CTG (monitoring for baby), hormone drip, breaking of waters
- May be easier to move about in labour.

The disadvantages of waiting for labour to start naturally may include:
- A very small risk of stillbirth
- Increased chance of baby passing meconium (doing a poo) on the inside and breathing it in.
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While you are waiting for labour to start, extra check-ups will be required for you and your baby. These check-ups usually involve monitoring your baby’s heartbeat using a cardiotocograph (also called a CTG machine) and may also include an ultrasound scan to measure how much amniotic fluid is around your baby.

**Your baby’s movements**

Your baby should continue to move right up to, and through labour. If you notice a decrease or change in patterns of your baby’s movement or have any concerns regarding their movement it is important to contact your midwife or the Delivery Suite on 02 9382 6100.

**What if I choose induction of labour after 41 weeks?**

When thinking about induction of labour you may want to talk to your midwife or doctor to weigh up the risks and benefits of all of your options.

The benefits of induction of labour after 41 weeks may include:
- Reduced risk of complications including stillbirth for your baby
- Reduced risk of having a caesarean section

The risks of induction of labour may include:
- Increased need for pain relief including an epidural. This may lead to further intervention such as forceps or vacuum assisted birth
- Small increased risk of maternal bleeding

You may need to have some help to get your cervix ready for labour. Please read “Induction of labour” patient information leaflet.

An induction of labour involves a combination of breaking your waters and the use of medication to get labour started. The aim is to get your cervix to open up and the uterus to start contracting. During your induction midwives and doctors will work together to look after you. Your baby will be continuously monitored by CTG.

If you decide you would like to have an induction of labour your midwife or doctor will arrange a suitable date for you.

**What if I reach 42 weeks and labour hasn’t started?**

If you reach 42 weeks gestation your care provider will discuss with you the risks to you and your baby of going beyond 42 weeks.

These risks may include:
- The risk of stillbirth is still low, although increases from 3 in 1000 at 41 weeks to 7 in 1000 at 42 weeks.
- An increased chance of your baby being bigger
- An increased risk of caesarean section operation

**Next steps for me:**