

Fact Sheet

Natural ways to bring on labour

womensnewbornhealth.com.au

Baby overdue? Here are some safe and natural ways to bring on labour.

A full-term pregnancy is between 37 and 42 weeks; there is a full five weeks span of time where it is normal for you to go into labour and your baby be born.

Once you reach 41 weeks gestation, your midwife or doctor will talk about your options to bring on your labour (induce) if you don't give birth in the following week.

Here are some ways you can try to get labour started by yourself. While there is not enough evidence to confirm how well they work, many women find it helpful to try non-medical methods to set the final 'ripening process' in motion and minimise the chance of going "way overdue".

Most pregnant women prefer to avoid being induced and would rather go into labour naturally

So how can this be achieved with safe, natural methods?

- Ask your midwife to consider doing a "Stretch and Sweep" (sometimes called a membrane sweep) to encourage your cervix (neck of the womb) to stretch, thin out and separate your membranes (the sac of amniotic fluid around your baby) from the cervix. The midwife or doctor will do this by giving you a vaginal examination. A stretch and sweep is safe. However, some women describe it as uncomfortable, but it may help stimulate your labour within a couple of days. It is certainly worth trying as an easy step before induction of labour.

- Very gentle nipple stimulation of both your nipples for 5 minutes per hour throughout the day and night will help stimulate the release of a special hormone called oxytocin, the hormone needed to start labour naturally. It's referred to as the love hormone and will act on your cervix and encourage it to soften and begin to thin out in readiness for actual labour to commence. It may take several days of soft, gentle stimulation to trigger enough hormones to have an effect
- Drink about 4 cups of raspberry leaf tea per day during the final weeks of pregnancy to tone up the uterus and help prepare for labour. Search in the tea section of your supermarket or health food shop for Raspberry Leaf Tea. Add a tiny amount of honey if the taste is too bitter for you
- Walking, swimming and yoga - especially in the last trimester - are all very healthy activities to maintain a sense of wellbeing and normal hormonal activity during pregnancy. Endorphins (also known as feel-good hormones) and oxytocin levels are well maintained with physical exercise, which helps to reduce adrenaline and other stress hormones which may slow down or stop the normal process of labour and birth



Fact Sheet

Natural ways to bring on labour

womensnewbornhealth.com.au

- A fun option for you and your partner is clitoral stimulation and female orgasm, which produces lots of oxytocin and may help stimulate the pre-labour phase. If you feel up to it, actually making love can help as sperm contains prostaglandins
- Direct firm pressure over acupressure points either by partner or support person promote your body to work more efficiently. There are specific points that may help establish contractions and promote cervical dilation. (Search for "Deborah Betts acupressure booklet" and go to pages 14 and 15 for specific points to induce labour).
- Acupuncture is another option to consider. Research shows acupuncture can help the cervix ripen ready for labour. Look for a qualified practitioner in your area.
- Reflexology, using pressure points in your feet, is another natural therapy women use to help avoid going overdue. Does it work? Currently, we don't know. No research looks at the effectiveness of reflexology on bringing on labour.



Stress, fear and adrenaline may prevent an otherwise normal healthy woman from going into labour.

If you are stressed, your body will increase your levels of hormones, such as adrenaline, which overwhelms how much oxytocin you make. If a full-term pregnant woman is very stressed, she may be less likely to have normal oxytocin levels. This can be remedied with a few simple life changes.

Towards the end of your pregnancy, or if you are 'overdue', you will find that doing more activities you know make you feel better will increase your comfort and relaxation. Feeling comfortable and relaxed will help give you a sense of wellbeing, contentment, happiness, and stress-free.

Are you able to identify the activities in your life that may do this for you?

Perhaps this list will assist you:

- Pregnancy massage - either by your partner, a friend or a qualified massage therapist. Search for a local practitioner in your area
- Eat healthier foods and reduce unhealthy foods. Avoid all alcohol, street drugs and tobacco, as they have unwanted negative side effects on the nervous system
- Play relaxation music while laying down, resting or soaking in a nice warm bath - for more ideas on relaxation, see our relaxation fact sheet
- Meditate in a quiet place in your home - perhaps even set up a quiet, peaceful area using cushions, a lounge chair, day bed or a favourite place in nature, by a creek, river, park or garden



Fact Sheet

Natural ways to bring on labour

womensnewbornhealth.com.au

- Catch up on your current health and wellbeing practitioner appointments such as the dentist, nutritionist, physiotherapist, chiropractor, osteopath, podiatrist, hairdresser, massage therapist, naturopath, acupuncturist, psychologist, personal trainer or life coach
- Reduce stress, drama and conflict in your daily life. Talk more quietly. Focus on ways to calm yourself. Always work towards family harmony in your own home
- Watch a relaxation film clip on YouTube or DVD
- Download a guided visualisation or progressive muscle relaxation audio program and practice daily. Relaxation can help reduce circulating adrenaline and cortisol, reduce pain and increase your sense of control. You need to train your brain to enable quick access to relaxation during labour and birth.
- Relax in a warm bath, turn off the bathroom light - perhaps light a candle and calm down in the semi-darkness while sipping cool water and applying a cool face washer to your forehead
- Lovemaking in pregnancy is a normal, healthy experience you can participate in unless a doctor or midwife advises against it. As your pregnancy progresses into the 3rd trimester, lovemaking can be a wonderful expression of your feelings for your partner. Lovemaking increases your oxytocin hormone levels; it is called the 'love hormone'! It can also give you a terrific feeling of release, relief and relaxation. You may find you need to experiment with a variety of different lovemaking positions to accommodate your belly bump, and in turn, this can possibly enhance your relationship with your partner after your baby is born
- Eat plenty of fresh vegetables, fruit, whole grains, proteins, vitamins & minerals. They are nutrient-rich, make you feel better and will give you the energy you need for labour and birth
- Walking outside in the sunshine and fresh air makes you feel more connected to nature and releases stress
- Taking regular naps in a peaceful place will refresh you and help you get ready for when your baby is home, and you are feeding
- Using aromatherapy can give you a relaxed feeling and reduce stress, tension and anxiety. Scents such as lavender, patchouli, jasmine, rose, and mandarin are gentle, subtle and reduce anxiety. Splash 5 drops of each scent into half a teacup of boiling water, and the steam will carry the scent around a room to fill the air with a wonderful aroma.



We welcome further feedback on this brochure as a way on continually improving our service. Send your feedback to:



wslhd-wmdwnhwebsite@health.nsw.gov.au