

# 19 Methods for Inducing Labor Naturally

Plus 3 Cautions for "Natural" Induction



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Looking for tips and techniques on **inducing labor naturally**? This article covers important information about your due date, **natural ways to induce labor**, important cautions if you decide to try these methods, plus factual information on each technique.

Old wives tales abound, so I'll talk you through the most common methods **and ones are the most likely to work for you.**

Induction of labor via synthetic oxytocin like Pitocin is known to have side effects both mom and baby, so many women are curious about more natural ways to get labor started - read on for more!

## Understanding Your Due Date

It's important that you understand how your due date is determined...

**...and if it's a reliable date or not (because many due dates aren't!)**

Most women are given a due date based on the date of their last period (the first day of your last period).

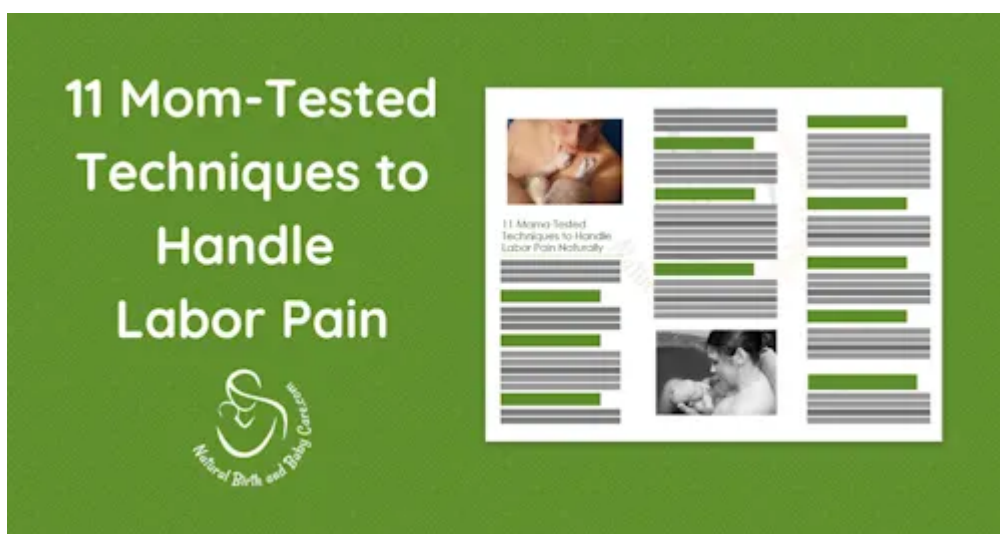
This calculation is based on the "textbook woman" who has a 28-day cycle with ovulation and conception occurring on day 14 of that cycle.

Even though conception happens on day 14, the pregnancy is dated from the first day of your period (so you're considered two weeks pregnant when you conceive).

This works for many women, **but if you don't know when your last period was you have irregular cycles, it could make your due date inaccurate.**

Even with an accurate due date, pregnancy lengths vary - in fact, **it's normal for time moms to go to 41 weeks pregnant (most moms will give birth before 4 weeks, but some will get there, too).**

(**NOTE:** Want Labor Pain Techniques that REALLY Work? Get these 11 mom-tested techniques for handling contractions from start to finish [Get the mom-tested natural labor techniques here.](#))



## Other Methods of Dating

Sometimes due date is determined by date of ovulation or conception. If you were charting your cycles and know when you ovulated, the calculated due date is like very accurate. Or, if you conceived via assisted reproduction (such as IVF), your exact conception date is known.

Ultrasound done in your first trimester is also used for dating your pregnancy.

These **due dates (based on ovulation, conception, or early ultrasound) are far accurate**, but as I noted above, pregnancy lengths vary.

## Why Does Due Date Accuracy Matter?

Your healthcare provider might begin pushing induction once you reach a certain point in pregnancy. If your due date is set earlier than it should be, **you could end up being pressured into induction before your baby is ready to be born.**

In reality, **we don't fully understand what triggers labor to begin. Your weeks of pregnancy don't always give good information on whether your baby is ready to be born.**

And **some common reasons for induction, such as going "overdue," do not line up with scientific evidence or researched best practices.**

Keep these things in mind **if you're reading this article because you're feeling pressured to give birth by a certain date your doctor has set.**

Even if you feel uncomfortable, or are worried about a pregnancy complication, it's important to weigh risks versus benefits of induction.

Remember, **choosing to "wait and see" is an option that should be weighed,** (in medical language it's called "expectant management.").

**You do not have to consent to an induction that you do not want to have.**


**As the pregnant woman, you're in charge and you may consent or withdraw consent at any time (and you may verbally withdraw prior written consent).**

Ask your doctor or midwife for full information on every possible decision if they recommend induction.

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## Cautions For Natural Induction Remedies

While the word “natural” in the term “natural induction methods” may lead you to believe these are all completely safe, it’s important to be informed about the risks and benefits of each method.

**Just because you’re trying these things at home and not the hospital does not automatically mean it’s completely safe.**

I’ll discuss issues with each particular method within that section, but I want you to remember that, again, we don’t fully understand how labor begins. **This means that even “natural” induction methods are used before labor has clearly begun on its own.**

**It’s possible to have a baby born before he or she is truly ready. Sometimes babies born a little too early need extra support with breathing, temperature, and blood sugar, etc.**

If a natural method works, these things are less likely to be an issue (because most natural methods fail if it’s much too early).

But **even a baby born a little early can have trouble with breastfeeding**, so it’s good to be prepared for the possibility that a slightly early baby may need extra support!

**Some methods, such as herbal induction methods, may also have side effects that cause problems for you or your baby. Read through each section to make sure you understand these risks.**

It's more difficult to induce labor (naturally or medically) for a first-time mom. After your first baby, your body remembers labor patterns and may be more responsive to these methods.

I like what midwife Anne Frye says about natural induction

“Instead of dangerous chemopharmacological agents such as oxytocin and misoprostol, natural methods are used such as herbs, acupuncture, nipple stimulation or other nonpharmaceutical remedies that stimulate the uterus safely and can be done at home. “Natural” also refers to the way that most of these methods work with the mother's body to encourage her to open to the energy of birth, gently allowing her body to take over on its own and produce a physiologic contraction pattern appropriate to her phase of dilation, not one artificially intensified. Natural induction is also unlikely to work if the mother or her baby is not really ready to go into labor.

## Reasons to Induce Labor

There are a number of reasons a doctor or midwife might recommend labor induction. Two common reasons are high blood pressure and gestational diabetes. Another is preeclampsia.

Evidence supports better outcomes for mothers with preeclampsia with early induction. The needs of your baby must still be weighed, however, as infant outcomes are poorer when baby is younger than 37 weeks.

**There's mixed evidence for all other reasons for induction,** though many of them are commonly cited as reasons to induce:

- Twins or higher order multiples
- Gestational diabetes

- Cholestasis
- Worry about a big baby
- Mother's age (usually if mom is greater than 35)
- Mother's weight (higher BMI moms are often offered induction)
- Amniotic fluid levels (particularly low fluid)

There's **not a lot of comprehensive research on inducing for the above issues (except preeclampsia), so we just do not know if induction is the better option.** But, these are reasons your care provider may urge you to consider induction.

**Without quality research trials to provide unbiased information, you're rely on what information we have, your provider's professional opinion (and his habits), and your intuition about what's right for you and your baby.**

Click here to listen to my podcast episode on [how to avoid induction](#).

This is a great listen, especially if you're feeling pressured!

## **What if Your Waters Have Broken?**

Prelabor rupture of membranes (called PROM by care providers) is a normal variation of labor, and almost **all** women will go into labor on their own within about 24 hours.

It is reasonable to wait for labor to begin.<sup>2</sup> See my article on [how to have a strong cervix](#) for more information on this topic and how to monitor if your water breaks before labor begins.

The most important thing to remember if you're waiting for labor to begin on its own is to **avoid vaginal exams, which are proven to increase the chance of infection.**

Midwives and doctors usually "start a clock" after a vaginal exam - in other words, if you don't go into labor within 12 hours, induction is *required* in their protocols.

**You always have the option to refuse consent to an induction, but vaginal exams do increase the likelihood of infection.** Again, see my article on [how to have a strong cervix](#)

[strong bag of waters](#) for more information.

## What About a “Big Baby?”

**Evidence does not support induction for a suspected “big baby.”** There are many things to consider when you’re told you have a big baby...

...including the high likelihood that your baby is not the size that’s being estimated.

**Both ultrasound weight measurements and care provider estimates are often wildly inaccurate.**

**That means they can be off by a pound or more!**

Additionally, researchers are not even unified on what they call a “big” baby. Some researchers consider a baby weighing 4000 grams (8lbs, 13oz) or more big, while others use 4500 grams (9lbs, 15oz).

**Babies born at home average a higher weight than babies born in the hospital.**

It’s not unusual for home birth midwives to see babies in the 8-pound range. Mothers giving birth at home are often given [specific nutritional counseling](#) throughout pregnancy and have vibrant, healthy babies.

Babies born in the hospital may also be bigger than those mothers were given the same nutritional counseling.

Big babies are a concern for care providers because of shoulder dystocia, where babies have trouble in the final stages of birth. But **research *doesn’t* support that “big babies” are that much harder to birth** - shoulder dystocia can happen with babies of **any** size.

What makes a real difference with shoulder dystocia is the skill of the care provider assisting at the birth. Trained teams can navigate shoulder dystocia on a baby of any size with few to no complications for both mother and baby.

**A [healthy pregnancy diet](#) that has plenty of calories and is lower in carbohydrates results in a vibrantly healthy baby and a mama who has plenty of strength and energy.**

**energy for labor.**

## Revisiting Post-Dates Pregnancies

There is research to support induction once a mom reaches 41 weeks. Remember the explanation of due dates above, because often women are not where they think they are in pregnancy.

Given that reality, once a mama **does** reach 41 weeks, evidence shows induction reduce stillbirth rates. Guidelines recommending induction at 41 weeks are fairly universal across the world.

Induction is not the only option - fetal monitoring through expectant management is another possibility.

[Click here for more information on postdates pregnancy.](#)

## What's Happening at the End of Pregnancy

**Our culture is hyper-focused on controlling labor and birth**, so many women are induced (in the Listening to Mothers Survey, over 40% of mothers reported their providers trying to induce labor!).

Doctors' casual attitude towards induction sometimes makes you think the last weeks of pregnancy don't matter, but they do.

**The last weeks of pregnancy are the time of the greatest brain growth and development for your baby. Your baby's brain is on an accelerated growth path at this point, and is also storing up vital nutrients in the last few weeks.**

Your baby's lungs are also fully maturing. Neurological development important to sucking and breastfeeding is taking place. This is a vitally important time!<sup>3</sup>

## How Labor Begins

Though we understand much about how pregnancy and birth work, **we do not understand how labor begins. That's why chemicals like synthetic oxytocin (Pitocin) can be used to force uterine contractions, but labor will still fail to begin.**

The bodies of pregnant women are complex and beautiful - and labor and birth is a chemical symphony between mother, baby, hormones, and body.

One essential aspect of labor beginning is how ripe, or soft, the cervix is. I'll cover how you can ripen the cervix below but know that it's such an important factor that it's part of the Bishop's Score that obstetricians and midwives use to rank "readiness" for

## **The Bishop Score for Labor Induction**

Bishop's Score looks at signs that your body is ready for labor to begin.<sup>4</sup> **A high score indicates that induction is likely to succeed**, while a low score means it's likely to fail. This is especially important for first-time moms. Induction failure usually leads to cesarean section, and if your body and baby aren't ready, failure is highly likely.

**Some of the natural methods I cover below may help increase your body's readiness, but letting labor begin on its own is generally the best course of action unless there's a valid medical reason not to wait.**

The score looks at cervical dilation (how open your cervix is) as well as effacement (how thick the cervix is. Think of it like a turtleneck sweater being pulled down around the way around your head).

It also measures the **consistency of the cervix, which is the softness or ripeness mentioned**. The position of the cervix within the birth canal is another important point.

This Bishop's Score chart has been modified by Anne Frye, CPM, to include cervical sensations, vaginal secretions, and toning contractions (Braxton-Hicks contractions). The + sign indicates what Frye has included in addition to the standard score.<sup>4</sup>

# Modified Bishop's Score to Assess Potential Cervical Responsiveness to Induction of Labor

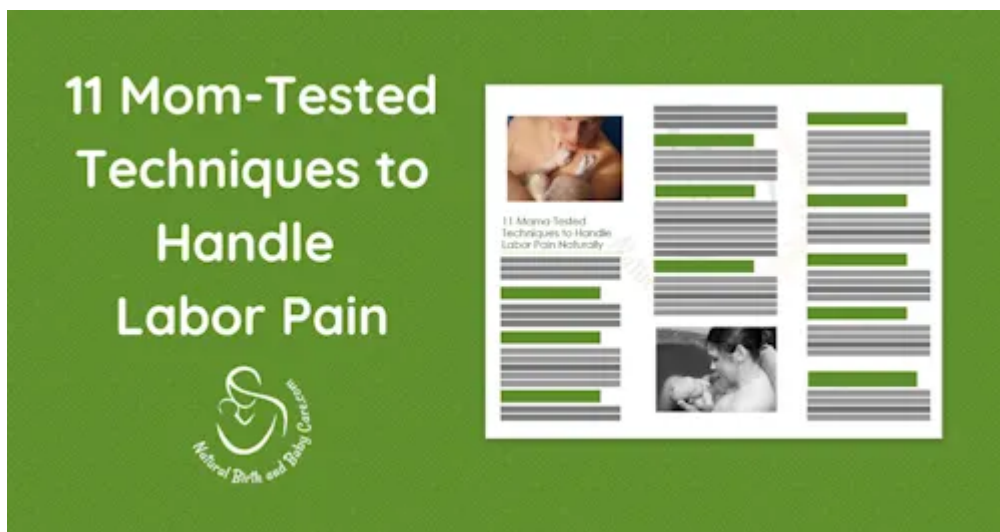
	Assign 0 Points	Assign 1 Point	Assign 2 Points	Assign 3 Points
Dilation (cm)	0	1-2	3-4	5-6
Effacement (%)	0-30	40-50	60-70	80-100
Station of Presenting Part	-3	-2	-1 to 0	+1 to +2
Consistency of Cervix	Firm	Medium	Soft	--
Position of Cervix	Very Posterior	Normally Posterior	Slightly off center toward the back	--
+Cervical Sensations	None	Slight	Strong and Frequent	Coordinated with some cervical softening on all toning contractions
+Yoni (Vaginal) Secretions	No increase	Increased mucus	Increased with bloody mucus	--
+Toning contractions	None to slight	Mild	Strong, sporadic, frequent	Almost regular, visible on abdominal observation

+ = items added by Anne Frye that are helpful from a midwifery-model perspective

## Scoring the Bishop's Score Chart:

- **7 or less:** Do not attempt induction without ripening the cervix first
- **9 or more:** Favorable to attempt induction
- **12 or more:** You are ready for labor or in early labor, a little encouragement things going!

(**NOTE:** Want Labor Pain Techniques that REALLY Work? Get these 11 mom-tested techniques for handling contractions from start to finish [Get the mom-tested natural labor techniques here.](#))



## The Big List of Ways to Induce Labor Naturally

### #1 Oxytocin, Rest, and Relaxation - Keys to Labor

The release of oxytocin, our “feel good” and bonding hormone, is a critical **the start of labor**. It can be hard for oxytocin to flow when you’re struggling with stress, exhaustion, and other tension.

The end of pregnancy is a great time to take it easy - cut down or stop working as much as possible. **Prioritize rest. Try to nap during the day**, especially if nighttime sleep is interrupted by discomfort or bathroom breaks. You’ll want energy for labor and rest boosts your mental well-being.

This is a great time to take daily walks. Movement is key to getting labor started. walks, do squats, and move around. Walking stairs and uneven terrain (use a wall stick, rails, etc. so you stay stable) helps get your baby down deep into your pelvis.

Dancing is helpful, especially traditional women's dances that emphasize hip movement. **Movement and dancing help release endorphins and boost oxytocin.**

Again, balance that good movement with rest.

**Indulge in things that make you happy: good books, funny movies, meals with loved ones, and folding baby clothes are all things many women find helpful. These activities all produce oxytocin.**

A warm bath at night can help ease aches and pains and allow you to relax so **hormones can flow freely.**

Seeing a massage therapist and **having massage work, including foot massage may be relaxing and help boost oxytocin.** Additionally, it may help you relax a little and get some sleep. While this may or may not directly focus on acupuncture points (discussed below), it may comfort you and help get oxytocin flowing.

Additionally, things that help you relax and rest well at night encourage **the production of melatonin, which researchers have found works synergistically with oxytocin** to establish strong labor patterns. This is likely why most babies are born at night when labor begins on its own.

Make sure you eat well and stay hydrated - when contractions pick up, you want energy reserves for labor! **It's helpful to have carbohydrate-heavy meals in the days before you want labor to begin.** The uterus is a huge muscle and needs a good amount of glycogen for labor.

[Click here for more on why oxytocin is so important to labor - and how to keep it high!](#)

## **#2 Acupuncture and Acupressure to Induce Labor**

Acupuncture is a traditional Chinese medicine technique that involves meridians, lines of energy within the body. During acupuncture, needles are positioned along targeted meridians.

Acupressure uses pressure from the practitioner's finger to stimulate the same meridians. Acupuncture must be done by a trained professional.

While the technique may seem weird, **research studies have proven the efficacy of acupuncture for various issues, including infertility.** In *Holistic Midwifery*, Vol Anne Frye notes that acupuncture is a non-invasive method that may work for some women. She notes it may take a few sessions, so it's wise to begin as soon as indications that labor needs to begin come up.<sup>5</sup>

Rebecca Dekker of Evidence Based Birth notes that acupuncture, acupressure, and shiatsu techniques don't have a lot of strong evidence for their use, **but overall it is likely beneficial for ripening the cervix.**

Shiatsu is a Japanese technique with some differences from acupressure, and in some studies seemed to be promising.<sup>6</sup>

**Acupressure for induction may be particularly helpful if used consistently along with other methods, then just prior to cervical ripening methods,** such as sexual intercourse (cervical ripening is detailed below).

**I was right at my due date with my fifth baby when I went for a chiropractor appointment. My chiropractor asked if I'd like her to use the acupressure point for labor and I told her I would. That appointment was at 5:30 pm and I was in labor by around 7:30 pm!**

My body may have just been ready, but I still feel it's worth trying for mamas ready to begin labor! [Click here to read Honor's birth story!](#)

## **Cervical Ripening**

**As mentioned above, cervical ripeness, or softness, is an important indicator how ready your body is for labor.** It's a good measure of success for induction labor - either naturally or with chemicals like Pitocin.

Two common methods for cervical ripening are using plant-based oils or using sexual activity. I'll cover each in its own section:

### **#3 Evening Primrose Oil and Other Plant-Based Oils with Prostaglandin Precursors**

Evening primrose oil for labor induction is the most common recommendation. Evening primrose and black currant oils are also used by midwives.

Prostaglandins are hormone-like substances that work in the body. **Evening primrose oil, or EPO, contains prostaglandin precursors that act on the cervix. EPO can help ripen the cervix and prepare it for labor.**

A recent, well-conducted study used 1000mg of evening primrose oil in a soft vaginal capsule. Women inserted the capsule vaginally and remained lying down for 2 hours after. They started the protocol at 38 weeks.

**The EPO resulted in a greatly increased Bishop score and dramatically reduced the need for induction of labor.** Early labor was much shorter and there were fewer cesareans needed. Though this study was well-run, it was small. It indicates promising results, but further research is needed.<sup>7</sup>

**Other studies have also shown a shorter early labor, but active labor length doesn't appear to change.**

Oral evening primrose oil use does not seem to show the same beneficial effects as vaginal use, though most studies were done with a shorter duration (only a week) than the vaginal EPO studies.

Overall, studies show that evening primrose oil is safe, though studies on non-pregnant women caution against using it for women who take phenothiazine or

anticoagulant medications.

There is also a *case report of a woman who took a massive dose of EPO and had a newborn with skin lesions*. Researchers are not sure if the evening primrose oil caused this.

## #4 Sex

Sexual activity for inducing labor can work for a few different reasons:

**Prostaglandins help soften the cervix and get your body totally prepared for labor. Semen is the highest biological source of prostaglandins, and women who have had sex have greatly elevated prostaglandin levels for hours.**

**Sex that includes nipple stimulation may be effective at getting labor going because of the powerful effect on the uterus** (see below for more on nipple stimulation).

Sex also directly causes uterine contractions in a couple of ways.<sup>8</sup> First, penetrative sex may cause some uterine contractions.

**Female orgasms cause uterine contractions predictably.** Not only has research shown this, you can feel it! The orgasm can happen in any way - during sex, partner stimulation, or self-stimulation. You can climax before your partner does. Just remember that semen also helps ripen the cervix!

While there's not strong research evidence to back up using sex to induce labor, **having frequent sex in the third trimester has shown a protective effect on heart rate during labor.** Evidence Based Birth has hypothesized that sexual activity may "prime" baby for labor.<sup>8</sup>

Though research trials haven't shown a big effect from sex, observational studies including **fewer post-date pregnancies. Unprotected sex was used in the observational studies, meaning semen could contact the cervix.**

There are so many variables with sex for induction, so here's a summary of what remember:

- Enjoy orgasm
- Semen has prostaglandins that ripen the cervix. Midwife Anne Frye notes the ingestion may be effective, too HM2<sup>9</sup>
- Make nipple stimulation and lots of skin-to-skin contact part of your foreplay; increase oxytocin

As a note, sex is safe for low-risk pregnancies, though it's contraindicated if you're at risk for preterm birth or if your waters have broken (some women choose to be intimate after waters have opened).

## #5 Nipple Stimulation

**Nipple stimulation is a proven method to bring on contractions. The release of oxytocin signals the start of contractions, and many women notice them throughout the entire time stimulation is happening.** Nipple stimulation has been used by many cultures worldwide to encourage labor to begin.

Evidence shows that **nipple stimulation tends to work - many women go into labor within about 72 hours.** An important caveat is that the cervix needs to be ripe, so it's a good idea to use some cervical ripening methods before trying nipple stimulation.

Breast stimulation doesn't produce the same effect - **you must directly stimulate the nipples when you use this technique.** Many women use a breast pump (or two on each breast). Manual stimulation of the nipples with your fingers, your partner's fingers, or by nursing a baby is also effective.

**Stimulate the nipples in one-to-two-hour sessions and do so several times throughout the course of the day.** Make sure you're well-rested and relaxed so you have energy when labor kicks in!

**Positive side benefits from nipple stimulation were seen in the research trials: faster labor and lower rates of postpartum hemorrhage.**<sup>10</sup>

*There is a case report of fetal heart rate increasing too much during breast stimulation so it's important to consider that when you decide if trying this technique is something you want to do.*<sup>10</sup>

## #6 Membrane Stripping or a Membrane Sweep

Membrane stripping is a common method for inducing labor and is done by your midwife or doctor. **Though this is a drug and medication-free method of inducing labor, it's considered a mechanical method, meaning hands are used to try and physically get labor going.** It's an outpatient procedure that can be done at your prenatal appointments.

A gloved finger (or two fingers) of your care provider is inserted into the uterus through your vagina and cervix.

The index finger (or two fingers) is then used to firmly "sweep" in a smooth, circular motion around the lower edge of your uterus, separating the bag of waters from uterine tissue.

Bits of the decidua parietalis (the innermost uterine lining) are left on the baby's waters. These trigger inflammatory responses in your body that include prostaglandins, which may help stimulate labor. Other hormones, including oxytocin, may also be released.

**Your care provider may try to stretch your cervix open some as she does the procedure, especially if your cervix is very soft and ripe. "Stretch and sweep" is another name some care providers use for the procedure because of this method.**

This procedure may be uncomfortable, with pain during the procedure itself and cramping after (even if labor doesn't start). Fortunately, most women reported no or only a little discomfort in most research trials.

Some women also reported that it caused irregular contractions that did not lead to labor. They felt it was harder to rest with those contractions, so it's something to consider when you're

You'll likely lose your mucus plug and may see a bloody show. There is about a 9% chance of your water breaking during the procedure.<sup>11</sup>

If your water breaks before labor begins, your care provider may try stripping your membranes to encourage labor to come on. **It's best, however, to have an intact membrane sweep since that reduces the risk of infection from this procedure.**

**A successful membrane sweep usually brings on labor within about 24 hours.** It can be done more than once if labor doesn't begin with the first procedure. Evidence shows that stripping the membranes does increase the Bishop Score (which I discuss above) and may reduce the risk of chemical induction of labor.

**Best practice guidelines often recommend a membrane sweep once you reach 36 or 37 weeks. There's no reason to have it done routinely earlier in pregnancy, such as at 36 or 37 weeks.**

**Important Note:** Membrane sweeping is often done *without consent* during a vaginal exam at the end of your pregnancy. As Rebeka Decker of Evidence Based Birth noted on her podcast "membrane sweeping is a medical procedure that requires informed consent."<sup>11</sup>

**There's little reason to have vaginal exams done at this point, so one way to avoid this is to decline vaginal exams.** But if you choose to have one, tell your provider clearly that you want to discuss membrane stripping **before** s/he does the procedure!

**The right language is "I do not consent to a membrane strip or sweep without my permission." Medical providers understand "I do not consent" as a clear "NO."**

## **#7 Cervical Massage and Pressure Points for Induction**

Cervical massage is used when your doctor or midwife wants to sweep your membranes but the cervix is not softened enough for that procedure. **There is**

**evidence to support that cervical massage makes a difference in when you get into labor.**<sup>11</sup>

Your care provider will massage the cervix using specific techniques. Midwife Anne Frye details how care providers can stimulate cervical pressure points to induce labor at term. She notes the technique comes from German midwife Barbel Kesting, who reportedly learned it from traditional midwives in India.<sup>12</sup>

Frye stresses using cervical pressure points when the cervix is ripe, though studies have shown that massage can help ripen the cervix. In her description, Frye does mention **light massage to soften the cervix before using the pressure points, which correspond to a clock face on the cervix.**

She recommends being in a tub of water or very comfortably warm (with warm blankets) and **having your spine as straight as possible during the procedure is thought to facilitate energy through the spine, similar to the energy line meridians used in acupuncture.**

## #8 Russian Cold Water Labor Induction

Russian midwives traditionally used cold water to trigger labor induction. To use this technique, you need access to a shower with good water pressure. **Turn on the cold water and set the shower head to a setting where the water jets are as direct and forceful as possible. Get in the shower for 15-30 seconds, long enough to let the water jets hit all over your body and get your wet.**

Cold water labor induction works best if you're calm and quiet in the shower (according to the Russian midwives!). This method may work by triggering hormonal responses in your body...

...or it may just be cold. Midwife Anne Frye notes **this Russian technique is different than Chinese medicine perspectives, which recommend warmth for the mother.** But midwives felt it tended to be quite effective, and it can be repeated 3-5 times (with a 30 minute break between showers).<sup>13</sup>

## #9 Belly Lifting and Belly Massage

Lifting your belly up to the level of your belly button during Braxton-hicks contractions may help, notes midwife Anne Frye. She explains that **lifting your belly during contractions changes the angle of the uterus.**

It may be particularly helpful if you know your baby is posterior, or if your baby is sitting far out in front of your belly. **Lifting brings your baby more directly over your cervix and boosts the power of the contraction.**<sup>14</sup>

Massaging the uterus itself stimulates contractions. Midwife Anne Frye discusses **a warm oil and gently cupped hands to massage the uterus in large, smooth circular motions. Use the pads of your fingers and knead the uterus as you r through the massage.** It's okay to be firm, but make sure it's comfortable. Frye r that most women enjoy this.<sup>15</sup>

## #10 Essential Oils for Induction

Anne Frye recommends **using essential oils in your carrier oil when doing the above belly massage. A full-body essential oil massage is helpful when trying induce labor,** according to Frye.<sup>16</sup>

It helps relax you and oils are potent and may help stimulate labor. **Massage all but focus on your belly as I described in the above section. Stimulate acupre points (discussed above), as you do the massage.** Of course, a helper to do the massage makes it much easier and more enjoyable!

2ml palma rosa diffused in 100ml of carrier oil, or jasmine oil, are options.

**Remember that essential oils, herbs, and substances like castor oil are a dire intervention in the natural process of starting labor. They are potent and it's important to weigh decisions carefully, even when using "natural" remedies**

## #11 Spicy Food

Eating spicy food may fall more into the realm of “old wives tales” than any proven induction method, but it is a strategy women have used and shared - likely since started having babies!

**Spicy food may theoretically work because it stimulates the digestive system. A delicious meal with enjoyable company is also a proven way to boost oxytocin levels.** And being well-nourished with good energy levels is important for labor to begin.

Remember that spicy food can also cause indigestion for some women, so if you normally enjoy spicy food, this may not be the right time to try it!

## #12 Dates

Eating date fruit in the 3rd trimester has become popular. Can dates induce labor? A number of research studies have looked at date fruit and how it impacts the end of pregnancy.

**While dates don't induce labor, they do appear to impact pregnancy, causing labor to start sooner and reducing the overall length of labor. Women who eat date fruit at the end of pregnancy seem to have a softer, more ripe cervix. Date fruit also seems to cause the cervix to dilate more.**

Women ate 70g of dates daily for 20 days in some studies showing that the fruit made a difference. **This is 3-4 large medjool dates or 6-10 smaller dates.**

A newer randomized trial has also shown that eating dates in early labor seems to speed labor moving faster. Another trial demonstrated that women had lower pain in labor when they ate dates. Consider having some dates on hand for your birthing time.

It's important to note that while dates are extremely nutrient-dense, containing many micro-nutrients, **they are also very high in sugar. Most studies on date fruit excluded women with blood sugar issues like gestational diabetes because of this.**

## #13 Pineapple

Pineapple for inducing labor has been a tradition in some cultures around the world. **There are no human research studies on pineapple.** Studies in rats have shown using pineapple directly on uterine tissue stimulates contractions, but feeding rats pineapple does not.<sup>18</sup>

Many midwives still like to have their clients eat pineapple, however, and some include it in a castor oil smoothie recipe.

**Pineapple's effects may be related to serotonin, so activities that help boost oxytocin may also boost your serotonin levels naturally.**

## #14 Castor Oil

Castor oil has a long tradition of being used to induce labor. It's an oil made from the castor bean plant, which is native to northern Africa and the Middle East. Castor oil is often used for its laxative effects.

Research on castor oil has shown it is effective for getting labor started in most women. **Research trials have generally administered it between 40 and 42 weeks of pregnancy.** Most women in the castor oil trials went into labor within 24 hours, so. The studies do show it's more effective if you've given birth before.

**Castor oil seems to cause action in the uterus itself, not just by stimulating the bowels as a laxative.**

Side effects for castor oil include nausea, though surprisingly, most women do not experience increased bowel activities. Stomach upset was frequent in some studies but in others, only a few women noticed this side effect. Some studies showed women had a faster labor, but most did not.

Overall, castor oil seems very safe for pregnant women to use **when they reach 40 weeks.** *One case study reported a woman who took a small dose of castor oil had a uterine rupture* - the woman had a prior cesarean and it's not clear if the rupture was related to the castor oil or not. It is worth considering if you're planning a VBAC.<sup>19</sup>

Midwife Anne Frye notes she has seen *women having more frequent bowel movements when using castor oil. Additionally, she cautions about the possibility of dehydration* recommendation is to have your midwife supervising closely if you choose to use castor oil.<sup>20</sup>

Some worry that using castor oil may increase meconium staining in baby's amni fluid (meconium is baby's first bowel movement, and staining means baby has passed meconium in the womb, which can be dangerous). However, *there does not seem to be research evidence to verify this side effect.*

**Use a pharmaceutical grade castor oil (USP grade) which is a high quality oil with no impurities.**

A 60 milliliter dose is used in most of the research studies and by most midwives. Mixing the castor oil into something else can make it easier to get down. If you can't drink, use a straw that can move it to the back of the throat. The thick, oily texture is more of a problem than the taste.

Anne Frye recommends **a few methods, including:**

- 3 scrambled eggs with castor oil added after cooking
- Whisk together with any liquid and a teaspoon of lecithin. The lecithin helps emulsify the castor oil into the drink
- Have the castor oil straight, followed by a chaser of apple juice
- Add castor oil, two scoops of ice cream, and juice. Blend to make a "creamsicle". Many midwives use orange juice, but Frye notes some women find this causes uncomfortable bowel movements for some, so suggests grape or apple juice as an alternative.<sup>21</sup>

## #15 Midwife's Brew Recipe

The midwives brew recipe is a natural induction recipe containing castor oil. Sometimes called German labor cocktail, it is supposed to help get labor going quickly.

It's generally recommended that you try this recipe **only after 40 weeks**, though see many mothers on social media and Youtube trying it earlier...

**...remember that your baby's brain is going through incredible growth and change in the last couple of weeks of pregnancy.**

It's important to give baby that development time unless there is a medical reason for induction (**and that medical reason is *not* your doctor telling you he thinks you should induce because you're close to your due date.**

**As noted above, only preeclampsia and high blood pressure have clear evidence to support induction).**

Here's the **recipe for Midwives Brew:**

- 10 oz of Apricot Juice
- 8 oz of Pure Lemon Verbena Tea
- 2 Tbsp of Castor Oil
- 2 Tbsp of Almond Butter

Start by making the tea, and **steep it so it's strong**. Blend everything together on a high setting. Then drink it all up - it's recommended on an empty stomach.

It's best to have this at night, as hormones at night are favorable to labor beginning. Consider drinking the brew after dinner, and close to bedtime.

Here's a mom sharing her experience with it:



## Midwife's Brew Labor Induction VLOG | It Worked Too Fast This Time

Brittany Kelly



Watch on

### #16 Herbal Supplements

A few herbs are traditionally used to tone the uterus or to prime the uterus for labor. The first is **red raspberry leaf**, usually taken in a pregnancy blend as a red raspberry leaf tea. This herb is believed to be a gentle uterine tonic, and is **safe to take in moderation** throughout pregnancy.

Herbal remedies are also used to directly induce labor. Blue cohosh and black cohosh are the traditional herbs of choice (**Please read my reasons for NOT recommending them below**). Midwife Anne Frye recommends 10 drops of blue cohosh, 10 drops of black cohosh, and 10 drops of ginger tincture in water every 4 hours.

Alternatively, she notes you can use a labor preparation tincture. Cotton root bark is another possibility (1 dropper full every 2-3 hours).<sup>22</sup>

While red raspberry leaf tea is a mild tonic and safe for pregnancy, and cotton root bark is generally considered safe, the cohoshes, especially blue cohosh **are possible dangerous to use to induce labor**. Despite their traditional use, the safety concerns are significant.

There are no research trials for these herbs, *but case studies in the medical literature link blue cohosh with complications in babies, including stroke and heart attack, and threatening salt deficiencies in the mother. Additionally, though midwife Anne Frye's guidelines for using blue or black cohosh, she cautions that they can cause nausea, rate changes in your baby, and drops in your blood pressure.* She recommends only one dose of cohosh, using cotton root bark only afterward.<sup>22</sup>

I discuss blue and black cohosh because they're commonly mentioned for "natural labor induction, but it's important to remember that using herbs is an interventional. These herbs may increase contractions, **but they are tied to birth defects and I problems. Blue cohosh and black cohosh are potent herbs with documented dangerous side effects - I do not recommend using them.**

Doctor Aviva Jill Romm extensively documented blue cohosh in her thesis for Yale. I recommend studying her thesis if this is an intervention you're considering.<sup>23</sup>

Midwife Anne Frye recommends trying herbal tinctures with nipple stimulation to see how your body responds. **If nothing is happening after three hours, it's best to stop and try again another day.** If there are contractions after an hour or so, she says to look for your body to be in good labor by the 8-hour mark.<sup>24</sup>

Chamomile and saffron are two other herbs reported to help soften the cervix and prepare the body for labor. 1000mg of chamomile or 250mg saffron were used in clinical trials.

## #17 Enema

Midwife Anne Frye mentions using an enema to help get labor started. **Like castor oil, this method gets your bowels moving. She notes that using an herbal infusion with the enema may be helpful (your body absorbs a lot through the bowels, including the herbs).**<sup>25</sup>

The herbal infusion used is in a tea form. Steep the herbs to a strong tea, cool thoroughly, then strain and use as the enema (about 1 quart).

Some women like enemas because they clean the bowels out before labor begins. Other women may find them uncomfortable.

Frye also notes that a **full enema may lift the baby in the bowel, helping him/her rotate into a more favorable position.**<sup>26</sup>

## #18 Physical Activity and Positions to Induce Labor

We've already talked about sex, which is a physical activity.

But other **physical activity can also be beneficial in getting labor started.** In fact, staying active throughout your pregnancy is a great gift to you and your baby, and including varied movement in your day is important.

Biomechanist Katy Bowman talks about "movement snacks" to help understand the importance of getting movement in. Just like you have food snacks throughout your day (especially when you're pregnant), you need regular movement snacks, too.<sup>2</sup>

### Find the Movement in Your Day

Nutritious Movement + The Move Your DNA Podcast



Watch on

**Taking walks is ideal throughout your pregnancy, and you can add in a long daily at the end. Always balance with rest, but long walks where you're going**

**over varied terrain (such as on an easy hiking trail) is especially good.**

**This kind of hike causes your baby to shift around inside your pelvis and can help him or her settle in more deeply.**

Using an exercise ball or birth ball can be helpful, too. **Sitting on the ball can ease aches and pains and requires you to align your spine properly.**

**This may cause your baby to rotate into a more favorable position for birth. Additionally, the birth ball causes your pelvis to open, which may bring baby down onto the cervix.**

Rotate/circle your hips around while on the birth ball to bring your baby down further into your pelvis.

**Dancing, especially belly dancing, can help get your labor started and with baby in a good position. Like moderate hikes and sitting on the birth ball, dancing helps bring your baby down into your pelvis.**

Traditional women's dances that focus on hip movements are especially good choices because the circling hip motions get your baby lined up.

Other movements to add in throughout your day include squatting, especially if you know your baby is in a good position already. Use a support if you need to - always safe, mama!

Then **walk up and down some stairs, spend a little time on hands and knees (this may be where the old wives tale of scrubbing your floor came from!) and enjoy playing with your other children. All of these movements are helping in creating room in your pelvis for your baby to rotate and settle well.** They may not directly stimulate labor, but many women have found labor starts soon after!

## **#19 Watching Birth Videos**

This is a novel idea from midwife Anne Frye. Frye says, **"watching and hearing other women give birth can be a powerful encouragement to get labor going."** She

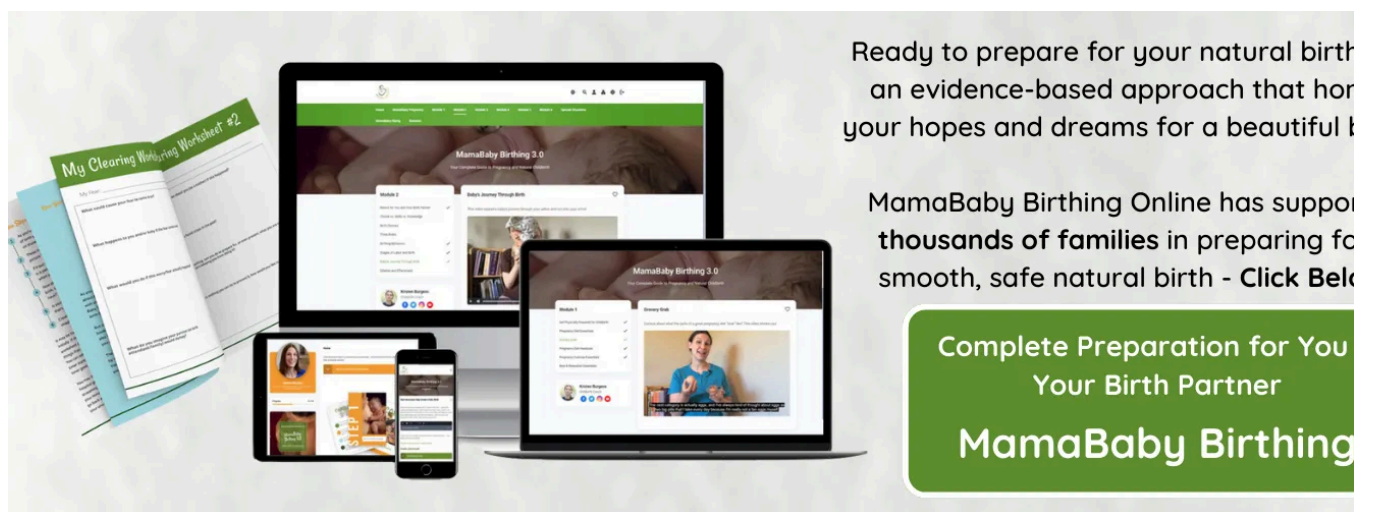
**does note that it's important to watch positive natural birth videos, preferal with the birth of the placenta shown on the video as well.**<sup>28</sup>

With so many videos available now, it can be challenging to find good ones. **I've curated a collection of beautiful birth videos for my MamaBaby Birthing students.** Now is the time if you haven't gone through a natural childbirth class y

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## Induce Labor at Home Fast FAQ

### What are ways to go into labor tonight?

It's best to wait until you're at term before you try to get labor going, because baby is still developing. But if you have a medical reason you want labor to get moving (remember, most reasons aren't validated by research)...

...here are some labor induction strategies to try tonight:

- Take a hike today, ideally going up and down stairs or terrain that mimics the
- **Eat an enjoyable dinner with plenty of carbohydrate-containing foods (boosts oxytocin and primes your muscles with energy)**
- Make Midwives Brew and have it close to bedtime (consider watching a funny movie just before, to get oxytocin flowing!)
- Try the Cold Shower method just before bed. Alternatively, have a relaxing w bath!
- **Make love before going to sleep. It's ideal if semen is deposited near the cervix and you experience orgasm!**

## **How Can I Induce Labor at Home ASAP?**

As I noted above, make sure you are at term. Many strategies I've outlined are a way from chemical induction.

But the list I posted in the question above is a good plan for trying to induce labor home ASAP - remember that the timing of things can really help. **Try to use methods in the evening.**

Remember to balance active strategies like hiking or cleaning with rest.

## **How can I dilate my cervix naturally?**

The best ways to dilate your cervix naturally are positioning and sex!

Being active, especially walking or hiking on uneven terrain, squatting, etc. all help move your baby deeply into your pelvis. This applies pressure to the cervix to help signal it should soften for labor.

**Sex is the best way to naturally apply prostaglandins to the cervix. These hormone precursors help soften it to get labor going. Orgasm also stimulates uterine contractions that can help soften and dilate the cervix.**

Once labor is going, being active helps keep the cervix dilating. Balance activity v rest - **remember that labor often has an ebb and flow, especially in early lab**

## **How can I jump start my labor naturally?**

As I've noted in the answers above, there are many different ways to get your bo ready for labor.

It's important to get enough rest so you have energy for labor. Go with carbohyd loading so your muscles have plenty of energy. And rest as you feel you need to.

**Between rest, add in lots of active movement - lovemaking, long hikes, wall stairs, dancing...**

**...all of these can settle baby down onto your cervix and help it prime for la Lovemaking also brings potent prostaglandins, which we know soften the c**

If you're past 40 weeks, read some of the ideas I listed out above to see if they resonate with you, but remember that sometimes sitting back, ignoring everyone opinions, and just giving yourself and your baby space is the best option.

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**Natural Induction Methods**

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Start Labor ASAP

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