



Inducing Labor?



How effective is membrane stripping for inducing labor?

I was pregnant with my son during one of the hottest summers on record. By the time the end of my [third trimester](#) rolled around, I was so swollen I could barely turn over in bed.

At the time, I worked in our local labor and delivery unit as a nurse, so I knew my doctor well. At one of my checkups, I begged her to do something to help spur my labor. If only they would strip my membranes to induce [labor](#), I reasoned, I could be out of my misery and meet my baby boy sooner.

Here's a look at how effective membrane stripping is for inducing labor, plus the risks and benefits.

Why is your doctor suggesting a membrane sweep?

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This motion helps separate the sac. It stimulates prostaglandins, compounds that act like hormones and can control certain processes in the body. One of these processes is — you guessed it — labor.

In some cases, your doctor can also gently stretch or massage the cervix to help it start to soften and dilate.

Your doctor may suggest trying a membrane sweep if:

- you're near or past your due date
- there isn't a pressing medical reason to induce with a faster method

What to expect

You don't need to do anything to prepare for a membrane stripping. The procedure can be done in your doctor's office.

You'll simply hop up on the exam table like at a normal checkup. The best thing you can do during the procedure is simply breathe through it and try to relax. Membrane stripping doesn't take long. The entire procedure will be over in a few minutes.

Is membrane stripping safe?

A study published in the [Journal of Clinical Gynecology & Obstetrics](#) found that there don't appear to be any increased risks for negative side effects in women undergoing membrane sweeping. Women who have their membrane swept aren't more likely to have a [cesarean delivery](#) or other [complications](#).

The study concluded that membrane sweeping is safe and in most cases, women will only need to have the procedure one time for it to work.

Is membrane stripping effective?

Experts still question whether or not membrane sweeping is really effective. A [review](#) of available studies concluded that the efficacy depends on how far along in pregnancy a woman is, and whether or not she uses other induction methods.

For women who are past their due dates, membrane stripping might be most effective. One study found that almost a quarter of the women went into labor on their own after having their membranes swept.

Remember, membrane sweeping isn't as effective as other [types of induction](#), such as using medications. It's generally only used in situations when there really isn't a pressing medical reason to induce.

What to expect after your membrane sweeping

To be honest, a membrane sweeping isn't a comfy experience. It can be uncomfortable to go through, and you may feel a bit sore afterward.

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Your cervix is highly vascular, meaning it has a lot of blood vessels. You may also experience some light bleeding during and after the procedure, which is completely normal. But if you're experiencing a lot of bleeding or in a lot of pain, be sure to go to the hospital.

Membrane sweeping is most effective if a woman:

- is over 40 weeks
- doesn't use any other type of labor-inducing techniques

In those cases, one study found that women, on average, went into labor on their own about a week earlier than women who didn't have their membranes swept.

The takeaway

If you're reaching a stage in your pregnancy where you're feeling miserable, talk to your doctor about the pros and cons of a membrane induction. But remember that unless there is a medical concern, it's usually best to let your pregnancy progress naturally.

But if you're past your due date and you don't have a [high-risk pregnancy](#), a membrane sweep might be very effective and safe to help put you into labor naturally. And hey, it might be worth a shot, right?



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