



Natural induction of labour

Normal labour occurs any time between 37 and 42 weeks of pregnancy and will start spontaneously when your baby is ready to be born. Trying to push your body into labour before you and your baby are ready can sometimes lead to complications, with one intervention leading to another. Most obstetricians advise medical induction about 10 - 14 days after your due date to avoid any risks to your baby and the increased chance of complications in labour, but if you don't want an induction discuss it with them. You do have the right to refuse, but be guided by their advice.

Although it can be very frustrating to go overdue, please don't ask a complementary therapist to try to start your labour unless they are also a qualified midwife or doctor, as they may not be able to assess whether or not it is safe, for you and your baby, to do so. There are, however, many ways in which complementary therapies can be used to help you go into labour if you are overdue.

Tips for avoiding medical induction of labour if you are "overdue"

- Sex –releases hormones which stimulate contractions; nipple massage also produces oxytocin (the hormone involved in both breastfeeding and labour) which makes your uterus contract. After 37 weeks of pregnancy, gently massage your nipples for 5 minutes a day – one at a time.
- Massage or reflexology can be relaxing and help you to get you through the last few weeks; regular treatments towards the end of pregnancy have been shown to help with the onset and progress of labour.
- Aromatherapy oils such as lavender and ylang ylang may also help, but don't use them in the bath once your waters have broken.
- Clary sage is a popular oil to start labour, but can cause very strong contractions and fetal distress. Do not use clary sage at the same time as any

other way of trying to stimulate contractions, including complementary therapies or medical induction such as rupture of the membranes, vaginal pessary or hormone drip. Clary sage should not be used before your due date and always with caution.

- After your due date, acupuncture or shiatsu techniques, can reduce the time between your due date and the actual onset of labour.
- Homeopathic remedies must be prescribed individually. Caulophyllum, if used inappropriately, can cause excessively strong contractions or, conversely, slow down labour which is already established.
- Traditional remedies to start labour eg drinking castor oil or having an enema are not recommended, as they can be very strong and are more likely to cause you to have diarrhoea than to establish contractions.
- A chemical in pineapple, called bromelain, is thought to cause contractions, but, you would have to eat about 7 or 8 pineapples, including the cores, to have any effect (which might cause diarrhoea!) Pineapple juice or eating canned pineapple is not effective, because the bromelain is destroyed by processing. Eating pineapple probably won't do you any harm, but it is unlikely to get you into labour. Some people develop an allergy to pineapple so don't go overboard.
- Always inform your midwife or doctor if you are considering natural remedies or complementary therapies to try starting labour. Do not ask a complementary practitioner to try getting you into labour, unless they are a midwife or doctor or have discussed your situation with your own midwife.

Any means of triggering contractions, other than allowing them to start naturally, is an intervention - if you use complementary therapies specifically to stimulate contractions you are interfering in the natural process in the same way as with a medical induction of labour. Induction of labour is a medical procedure for a specific medical reason. Only a doctor or midwife can assess whether or not it is safe and appropriate to induce labour.

For more individualised advice on avoiding medical induction if you go "overdue", call Expectancy on **0906 400 6227** (calls charged at £1.50 per minute, from a BT landline; calls from mobiles and other networks may vary).

