

# Your waters have broken but your labour hasn't started yet

Information and advice for women who are 37 - 42 weeks pregnant

## ***Maternity***

The bag of waters around your baby has broken and the fluid is able to trickle out, but your labour has not started yet. This is called pre-labour rupture of membranes (PROM).

You may have experienced a small trickle of water, or a gush of water. To confirm that your waters have broken but you are not in labour you may need to have a vaginal (internal) examination.

### **Why have my waters broken before my labour has started?**

Many women find that their waters do not break until near the end of labour, but for some women their waters breaking is a sign that labour will start soon. When labour is close to starting, the pressure from your baby's head on the neck of your womb can stretch the bag of waters so tight that it causes a hole to form in the bag and your waters to leak out.

### **What does this mean for me and my baby?**

When your waters have broken your baby should be delivered within the next 48 hours because there is a higher risk of an infection developing in your womb, and your baby developing an infection.

10 in 1000 women whose waters have broken but labour hasn't started yet will develop an infection in their womb, or their baby will develop an infection. 5 in 1000 women whose waters haven't broken will develop an infection.

### **What will I be advised to do?**

When you are 37 – 42 weeks pregnant and your waters have broken but your labour hasn't started, you will be advised to go home and wait for your labour to start. You should put a clean sanitary pad on and change it as often as you need to.

If you have been told you are Group B Haemolytic Streptococcus positive you will be advised to come to the delivery suite at City Hospital.

### **What are the benefits of waiting for labour to start?**

6 out of 10 women will go into labour naturally in the next 24 hours after their waters have broken, and most will go into labour within 48 hours. This means that you avoid the risks of being induced.

Induction of labour is appropriate after 24 hours.

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### **What are the risks of waiting for labour to start?**

If your baby is not born within the next 24 hours after your waters breaking, he/she will need to stay in hospital for 12 hours after birth so they can be closely monitored for any signs of an infection.

A small number of women will not go into labour within 48 hours and will be advised to have their labour induced. How soon you will be induced will depend on your individual circumstances. If you need to have an induction of labour you will be given more information about this.

If your waters have been leaking for longer than 48 hours but you do not want to have your labour induced we will need to monitor you and your baby closely for signs of infection. This will involve checking your pulse and blood pressure, examining your tummy to check your baby's position, listening to your baby's heartbeat and performing an internal examination using a speculum (a plastic instrument that goes in the vagina).

### **What are the alternatives to waiting for labour to start?**

An alternative to waiting for your labour to start naturally is to have an induction of labour. Please see the leaflet 'Induction of labour' for more information about this.

### **What should I do when I am waiting for my labour to start?**

- Get plenty of rest.
- Eat and drink normally.
- Check your temperature every 4 hours while you are awake.
- Avoid having sex as this will increase the risk of getting an infection in your womb.
- Wear a sanitary pad and change it regularly – do not wear a tampon as this increases the risk of infection.
- You can have a bath or shower as usual – this will not increase the risk of infection.
- While you are waiting for your labour to start you may have a 'show' – this is a lump or strands of mucous that is sometimes streaked with blood. This is normal and is a sign of your labour starting.
- You may also experience some mild period-like pains or tightenings of your tummy – these are not labour contractions. The pains will become more regular and much stronger when labour starts. If you start to get some mild pains you can take 2 500mg paracetamol tablets every 6 hours.
- Call maternity triage if you have any of the symptoms below or you are worried at all. There is someone available to answer your call 24 hours a day.

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### Symptoms to report

Please contact maternity triage straight away if you experience any of the following:

- The colour of the waters changes to yellow or green.
- You have any bright vaginal bleeding (other than your 'show').
- You feel unwell, hot, shivery or sweaty.
- You have a high temperature (38°C or above).
- Your baby is less active than usual.
- You have sharp tummy pains that are there all the time.

### Contact details

#### Maternity Triage

0121 507 4181

### Further information

#### NHS Choices Pregnancy and Baby Guide

[www.nhs.uk/planners/pregnancyandbabyguide](http://www.nhs.uk/planners/pregnancyandbabyguide)

For more information about pregnancy, childbirth and our maternity services please see the maternity pages of our websites [www.swbh.nhs.uk](http://www.swbh.nhs.uk), follow us on Twitter @SWBHnhs and like us on Facebook [www.facebook.com/SWBHnhs](http://www.facebook.com/SWBHnhs).

### Sources used for the information in this leaflet

- National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence, CG70 'Induction of labour', July 2008
- National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence, CG190 'Intrapartum care: Care of healthy women and their babies during childbirth', December 2014

If you would like to suggest any amendments or improvements to this leaflet please contact the communications department on 0121 507 5303 or email: [swb-tr.swbh-gm-patient-information@nhs.net](mailto:swb-tr.swbh-gm-patient-information@nhs.net)



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