

# Membrane sweep

Information and advice for women

## *Maternity*

### **What is a membrane sweep?**

A membrane sweep is a procedure that can help to stimulate your cervix (the neck of your womb) and start your labour. It involves a midwife placing their finger inside your cervix and making a sweeping movement to separate the membranes that surround your baby from the cervix.

A membrane sweep should be offered by your community midwife at around 40 weeks of your pregnancy because it is more likely to work at this time and is difficult to perform earlier than this.

### **What are the benefits of a membrane sweep?**

The benefit of a membrane sweep is that it reduces the chance that you will need to have your labour induced. This is because it releases a hormone called prostaglandin, which is involved in starting labour. If the membrane sweep is successful you will usually go into labour within 48 hours.

Having 2 or even 3 membrane sweeps 48 hours apart is the most successful in encouraging labour to start.

### **What are the risks of a membrane sweep?**

There are no known risks to having a membrane sweep, but you may find it uncomfortable and experience some vaginal bleeding or discharge afterwards. A membrane sweep will not be performed if you have a vaginal infection as this could spread the infection.

### **Are there any alternatives to having a membrane sweep?**

The only alternative to having a membrane sweep would be to do nothing, just wait for your labour to start. If a membrane sweep is not successful you will be offered an induction of your labour.

### **What are the risks of not having a membrane sweep?**

It is ok to do nothing and wait until you go into labour however up to 60 – 70 out of 100 low risk women having at least one membrane sweep will go into labour within 42 weeks of pregnancy. This means that they can have their birth in a birth centre or at home.

Waiting until 42 weeks and for induction of labour means we change your risk status to high risk and you will be admitted to the labour ward to be induced. Being induced increases your chances of needing other interventions such as a drip to speed up your contractions and even a caesarean section.

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### **What does a membrane sweep involve?**

A membrane sweep is usually performed either at home or in the antenatal clinic and takes about 10 minutes. You do not need to do anything to prepare for it.

This is what happens:

1. The midwife will explain the procedure to you.
2. She/he will ask you to lie on a couch or bed, remove your underwear and make sure you are comfortable.
3. She/he will examine which way your baby is lying by feeling your tummy and will check your baby's heartbeat.
4. The midwife will examine you internally and use her finger to separate the membranes surrounding your baby from the wall of the womb close to the cervix (neck of the womb) with a circular, sweeping movement.

If your baby's head is high or suspected to be in the breech position, your midwife will refer you to the hospital before a membrane sweep, to check that the placenta is not in front of the baby's head and confirm which position the baby is lying in.

### **Does it hurt?**

A membrane sweep is similar to having a vaginal/internal examination or smear test and can be uncomfortable. The midwife will use some lubricating gel to help reduce the discomfort.

### **After having a membrane sweep**

After your membrane sweep you should wear a sanitary pad and can go home and wait for your labour to start. Most women will go into labour within 48 hours. If you do not go into labour within 48 hours your community midwife will give you an appointment to come for an induction. You will be given more information explaining induction if you need one.

### **Discharge**

You may experience a 'show' after your membrane sweep; this is a mucousy discharge from the vagina which may contain some blood. If you have any fresh bleeding from your vagina please telephone the delivery suite.

### **Discomfort**

It is likely that you will get some tummy-tightenings over the next 24 hours. You can take some Paracetamol (2 tablets of 500mg) for this, but do not take more than the recommended dose. You might like to have a warm bath too which can also help.

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### Contact details

If you have any questions or are worried at any time you can contact maternity triage for advice.

**Maternity Triage** - 0121 507 4181

### Further information

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

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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