

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 spontaneous rupture of membranes.

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 you will be offered induction of labour immediately and up to 24 hours because there is a higher risk of an infection developing in your womb, and your baby developing an infection.

The risk of serious neonatal infection is 1% rather than 0.5% for women with intact membranes. (NICE 2021)

What will I be advised to do?

When you are 37 – 41+3 weeks pregnant and think your waters have broken, you should call Triage or Serenity where you will be advised to put a pad on and may be advised to come into hospital for review.

If you have been told you are Group B Haemolytic Streptococcus (GBS) positive you will be advised to come into hospital as soon as you think your waters have broken.

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. This means that you avoid the risks of being induced.

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 24 hours and will be advised to

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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 temperature, pulse and blood pressure, examining your tummy to check your baby's position and listening to your baby's heartbeat).

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 paracetamol as per the instructions on the packet.
- 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.

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.

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- You have a high temperature (38°C or above).
- Your baby's pattern of movement has changed.
- You have a constant pain in your abdomen that is not a contraction.

Contact details

Maternity Triage

0121 507 4181

Serenity Birth Centre

0121 507 5655

Further information

NHS website Pregnancy and Baby guide

<https://www.nhs.uk/pregnancy/>

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

Sources used for the information in this leaflet

- National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) (2021). Inducing labour [NG207]. [Online] Available at: <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng207> (Accessed 01 February 2023).
- National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) (2022). Intrapartum care for healthy women and babies [CG190]. [Online] Available at: <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/cg190> (Accessed 01 February 2023).

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