

# Part 1 Induction of labour: cervical ripening

This information sheet aims to answer some commonly asked questions about induction of labour. Informed consent and woman centred care are integral to health care in Queensland. Decisions about your care are always up to you.

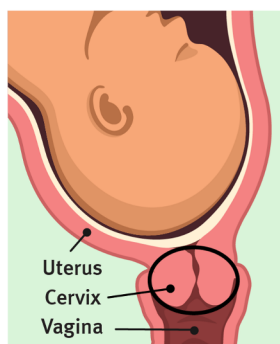
**IMPORTANT:** This is general information only. Ask your doctor, midwife or nurse about your own situation.

## What is induction of labour?

In most pregnancies, labour starts by itself. Induction of labour is the process of starting labour artificially. You can think of induction as having two parts. Part 1 aims to ripen (soften, shorten and open) your cervix, making it ready for contractions. Part 2 aims to start your contractions.

## What is the cervix?

The cervix is the lowest area of the uterus (womb). The cervix remains closed during pregnancy. During labour, the cervix opens to allow your baby to be born through the vagina.



*Illustration of uterus, cervix and vagina*

## What is cervical ripening?

Cervical ripening is when the cervix becomes softer, shorter and opens before labour begins. It normally happens on its own in readiness for labour. When labour is being induced, the cervix often needs ripening artificially.

## When does the cervix need ripening?

If the cervix is not ready for labour, it needs to be ripened before labour can be induced. The cervix is assessed during a vaginal examination. This helps your healthcare provider to work out how ready for labour your cervix is.

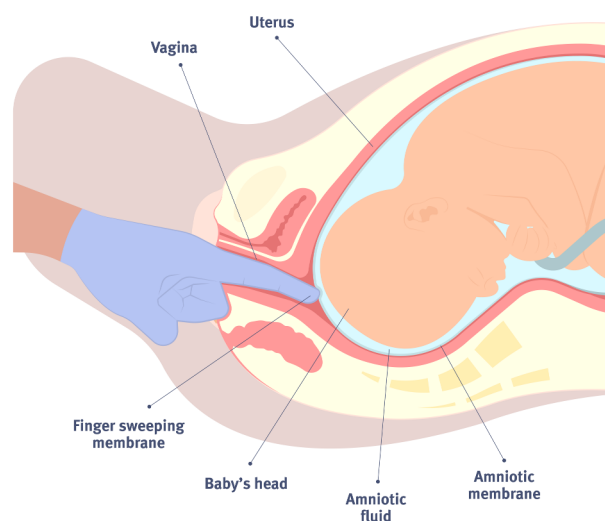
A number between 0 and 13 (known as a Bishop score) describes how ready your cervix is. A Bishop score less than 6 means your cervix is not ready for labour and needs to be ripened.

## What is a membrane sweep?

A membrane sweep separates the membranes around your baby from your cervix. It is done during a vaginal examination and can stimulate the release of natural prostaglandins. Sometimes, it can help start labour.

The procedure can be uncomfortable, and you may have a small amount of vaginal bleeding and some cramping afterwards.

A membrane sweep is safe for you and your baby. You do not usually need to stay in hospital. Sometimes you may be offered more than one membrane sweep.



*Illustration of membrane sweeping*

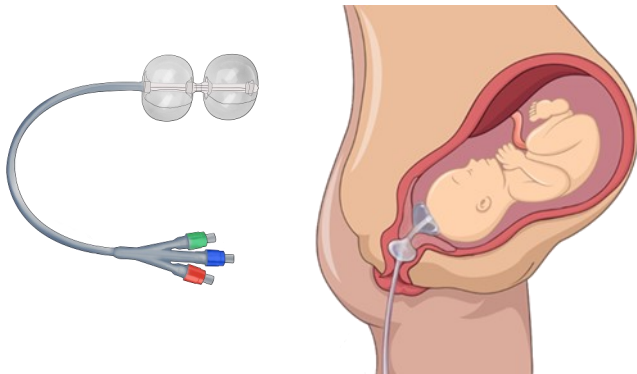


## How is the cervix ripened for labour?

There are two different ways to ripen the cervix. You might need one or both methods.

### 1. Balloon catheter:

A soft, thin tube (catheter) is passed into your vagina and through your cervix. Then one or two small balloons at the end of the catheter are filled with water. The balloon(s) helps the cervix to soften and open (dilate). The balloon catheter is usually left in for 12 hours.



*Left: Illustration of double balloon catheter.*

*Right: Illustration of balloon catheter inserted through the cervix.*

### 2. Prostaglandin

Prostaglandins are naturally produced by the body. They prepare the cervix for labour.

Artificial prostaglandins can do the same thing. A gel or pessary (like a small tampon) of artificial prostaglandin is inserted into your vagina. This causes your cervix to soften and open (dilate).

Pessaries take up to 24 hours to work. Gel takes around 6 hours to work. After 6 hours your cervix is checked to see if it is getting softer and starting to open. Sometimes more gel or another method is needed.

## How long does cervical ripening take?

Ripening your cervix can take 12 hours or more. Sometimes you, more than one method is needed to ripen the cervix, making it longer. prostaglandins.

## What happens when the cervix is ripe?

When the cervix is ripe (ready for labour), part 2 of the induction can happen.

See our parent information on breaking your waters and oxytocin for more information. Sometimes there can be delays if the maternity unit is unexpectedly busy or there is an emergency.



[Part 2 Induction of labour: breaking your waters and oxytocin](#)

## What are the risks and benefits of cervical ripening and induction of labour?

You can read about the risks and benefits in our general parent information on induction of labour.



[Induction of labour](#)

## Support & Information

**Queensland Clinical Guidelines Parent information** [www.health.qld.gov.au/qcg](http://www.health.qld.gov.au/qcg)

**13HEALTH** (13 432584) telephone support providing health information, referral and services [www.qld.gov.au/health/contacts/advice/13health](http://www.qld.gov.au/health/contacts/advice/13health)

**Pregnancy, Birth & Baby Helpline** (1800 882 436) free, confidential, professional counselling and information relating to conception, pregnancy, birthing and postnatal care. [www.health.gov.au/pregnancyhelpline](http://www.health.gov.au/pregnancyhelpline)

**MumSpace** website resources supporting mental and emotional wellbeing during and beyond pregnancy [www.mumspace.com.au](http://www.mumspace.com.au)

**Lifeline** (13 11 14) telephone crisis support service [www.lifeline.org.au](http://www.lifeline.org.au)

**Women's Health Queensland Wide** (1800 017 676) offers health promotion, information and education service for women and health professionals throughout Queensland. [www.womhealth.org.au](http://www.womhealth.org.au)

**Inform my care** website comparing information about public and private hospitals in Queensland [www.informmycare.qld.gov.au](http://www.informmycare.qld.gov.au)