



PATIENT INFORMATION: CERVICAL RIPENING AND LABOR INDUCTION

You have been scheduled for induction of labor. Induction is a “process” and, therefore, will take time before you are actually ready to deliver. There are generally two stages of induction. The stage of induction selected for you is dependent upon your cervical examination, your medical history and/or other factors. Your doctor will assess these factors and determine the best method for you.

CERVICAL RIPENING: Cervical ripening is a process by which the cervix is prepared to undergo induction. There are several different methods of cervical ripening. Before labor begins, your cervix is generally closed and long, similar to the appearance of a closed fist. As you go through labor, your cervix thins out like a sheet of paper and dilates to 10 centimeters. Cervical ripening is the initial process to help your cervix dilate and efface (thin out). It is done to improve the likelihood of success of your induction. ***It is not uncommon for the cervical ripening to take up to 24-36 hours!! It is also not uncommon to use different techniques to ripen the cervix.*** You may feel contractions during this process. If the contractions become painful, you will be able to request medication to relieve your discomfort. You will be advised as to what time to come to the hospital for your induction. The time may change depending on how busy things are on the labor and delivery (L&D) unit. Once you arrive on L&D, the Laborist (an Ob/Gyn physician) or the Resident will insert your cervical ripening agent. ***Please note: This cervical ripening process is not considered labor but the “prep work” to get you into labor.*** If all goes well, you will be ready for the second stage of your induction.

Since cervical ripening can be a long process, we strongly encourage you to send your visitors and support people home for the evening so that you, your family, and friends can sleep. ***SAVE your energy for when labor really starts. To make your experience a little more comfortable,*** your room has a television and Internet connection. Some patients will bring in their own music and sound system, or other distractions, to pass the time. If you wish, you can bring some familiar things from home, such as a favorite pillow, with you for your ripening process.

Common cervical ripening agents:

Cervidil – A vaginal insert of prostaglandin (hormone like substance that softens the cervix so it can dilate) that stays in the vagina for up to 12 hours

Cytotec – A medication that is inserted in the vagina every 4-6 hours

Cervical Catheter – A balloon tipped catheter that is inserted into the cervix and inflated to slowly stretch the cervix

Prostaglandin gel – A variety of gels used to soften the cervix



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OXYTOCIN INDUCTION: Once your cervix has been ripened, you are ready for the next stage of induction. Alternatively, your doctor may have determined during your office visit that your cervix is already effaced and/or dilated and will proceed directly to this stage, oxytocin induction. If this is the case, you will be advised of a time to come to the hospital based on bed availability. During this stage the medication, oxytocin (medication used to stimulate uterine muscle contractions) is administered intravenously. While this is an effective method, this process will also take some time. It may take a number of hours for your cervix to get to 5-6 centimeters dilated. It is at this time that you can officially tell your friends and family that you are in active labor! The doctors and nurses may examine your cervix intermittently throughout this time and will keep you updated on your dilation as you progress through labor.

Ready to deliver: Once your cervix is completely dilated, the baby will still take some time to deliver. The baby's head must descend through your pelvis. Your doctor will determine how low the head is in the pelvis (the station) and when it is most advantageous for you to begin pushing. On occasion, your doctor may elect to let you "labor down" rather than have you push for a prolonged amount of time. Laboring down is a process in which you will sit up in bed and let gravity and the force of the uterine contractions do the work. This too can take several hours. Laboring down allows you to conserve your energy for the final effort before delivery. Once you have labored down for a sufficient amount of time, your delivery team will instruct you on how to push until delivery. ***As a general rule, if it's your first baby and you have an epidural it may take you up to 2-4 hours, or longer, before delivery. If it's not your first baby, and you have an epidural, it may take you up to 2-3 hours, or longer, before delivery.***

FRIENDS AND FAMILY: We understand that this is one of the most important times in your life. You will have family and friends anxiously waiting for the delivery of your child. You may want to inform them about the cervical ripening and induction process as outlined above so that they can schedule their time off accordingly. While the entire process may take only a day (24 hours) or so, sometimes the process can be prolonged, lasting up to 2-3 days. It would be unfortunate if they have taken time off from work the day the induction process begins only to find that you have not delivered on that day. Also, plan accordingly: it's not very comfortable for children and elderly grandparents to sleep on the waiting room furniture for the time it may require for you to achieve active labor. ***Remember, it took nine months for your baby to develop and grow in your womb. It may take several days for the ripening and labor process to be completed and the baby to be delivered. Your baby will be well worth the wait!***

In summary:

- Induction of labor can be a 2 step process: cervical ripening and Oxytocin induction.
- When the process begins depends on bed availability.
- You will be cared for by a team of doctors and nurses throughout your stay.
- Successful vaginal delivery after induction of labor may take 1-3 days.