

## Home Cervical Ripening

You and your care team have decided to schedule an induction of labor. This is the process to start labor before it begins on its own. There may be a health reason, such as high blood pressure. It can also be done by choice. The goal in all cases is to have a vaginal birth.

To have a successful induction, the first step will be to ripen (ready) the cervix. A ripe cervix is soft, thin and may be open. This can be done with medicine or a cervical dilator.

### Cervical Dilator

Your care team has decided that you are able to ripen the cervix at home with a dilator. Using a dilator does not cause contractions. The day before you are induced, you will have a triage or clinic visit to place the dilators.

There are several types of dilators. One option is to use small, matchstick size rods that are put within the opening of the cervix. As they absorb water, they slowly begin to swell. This gently opens the cervix to get it ready for labor.

Another option is to use a catheter (a tube). The tube is placed through the opening of the cervix. A balloon is inflated between the baby's head and the cervix. Some types of catheters have a second balloon which is inflated in the vagina. The balloons apply pressure to the cervix. Some catheters are affixed with tape to the leg to apply pressure.

Your baby will be monitored for a short time after the catheter is placed. You will then go home until your scheduled induction time.

### Pain

You may have some mild cramping or pain from the dilator. This will go away soon after it is placed.

### At Home

- Eat light meals and drink liquids
- You can shower or bathe
- **Do not** put anything in your vagina (no sex, no douching)
- You may have some mild cramping and light spotting or blood-tinged mucous

### Removal

Once the cervix opens, the dilator may fall out. If it doesn't fall out, the dilator must be removed within 24 hours of being placed.

### Medicine

When medicine is used, you must stay in the hospital so the baby can be monitored. The medicine can cause contractions.

### Hospital Stay

- Your dilator(s) will be removed
- Your cervix will be examined to figure out the next steps
- If your cervix has dilated enough and baby is low enough, your water will be broken. You will then likely start to receive oxytocin through your IV.
- If your cervix is dilated but the baby is not low enough to safely break the water, oxytocin will be started. The water will be broken once the baby is lower.
- If your cervix is not dilated, a new cervical dilator may be used. You may also need medicine to soften the cervix.

## **When to Call**

Call right away if you have:

- Regular contractions
- Severe pain
- Rupture of membranes (your water breaks)
- Fever
- Less baby movement
- Heavy bleeding

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 2/2025 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#8180.