**Induction**

**What is labor induction?**

Labor induction is the use of medications or procedures to bring on labor. There are generally two parts: the ripening process and active labor. During the ripening process, the cervix is getting ready for labor and changes slowly. It gets softer, thinner and may open a little. Contractions, if you have any, may be milder. During the active labor, the cervix should open (dilate) more quickly and contractions are more painful. The whole process can take 1-3 days.

**When is labor induction okay?**

Labor should not be induced before 39 weeks, except for medical reasons. At 39 weeks, most babies are ready to be born healthy and not need help breathing. Before 39 weeks, if you have certain medical conditions, your doctor or midwife may recommend induction to be sure that you and your baby are safe.

**If an induction is scheduled by my doctor, what will happen next?**

If you are scheduled for an induction, you will be given an appointment date and time. Please arrive on Labor and Delivery at that time. If you are scheduled for an elective induction, you’ll be given a tentative appointment date. Priority for bed space on Labor and Delivery is given to patients in normal labor or having an induction due to medical reasons.

Please call Labor and Delivery the morning before your appointment to confirm your time. We will do our best to honor your appointment time, and if delayed will keep you informed as to what you should expect regarding your arrival time and start of your induction.

If you have questions regarding your induction appointment, please contact your doctor’s office, or call labor and delivery.

**What should I do before my induction?**

You should eat a meal and drink enough to stay hydrated before you arrive. Avoid heavy or greasy foods prior to your induction as they may upset your stomach. During your induction, you will have limited chances to eat and may be limited to clear liquids and jello. If you desire a shower or bath, you should take one before arriving. You may not be able to take another one till after the baby arrives.

**What can I expect after I arrive at the hospital?**

An induction of labor may require 1-3 days from start to finish (delivery). If necessary, the process of cervical ripening may require one or more medications and/or devices before active labor begins. Many factors determine how long the process will take, including how open your cervix is before starting the induction and if you have had a baby before. We encourage you to bring reading materials, movies and other stress relieving items for the early part of your induction.

**How is cervical ripening performed?**

Ripening can be done with medications (prostaglandins) or with a vaginal balloon. Prostaglandins are drugs that can be used to ripen the cervix. They are forms of chemicals produced naturally by the body. These drugs can be inserted into the vagina or taken by mouth. These drugs are not used in women who have had a previous cesarean delivery or other uterine surgery to avoid increasing the possible risk of uterine rupture (tearing). The vaginal balloon is a device placed through the cervix to help it dilate and help your body release its own prostaglandins. It is safe to use if you have had a previous cesarean delivery.

**How can breaking the bag of water bring on labor?**

Breaking the bag of water that surrounds the baby can start contractions. Most women go into labor within hours after the amniotic sac breaks (their “water breaks”). It also can make contractions stronger if they have already begun. The health care provider makes a small hole in the amniotic sac with a special tool. This procedure, called an amniotomy, can be performed during a routine cervical exam and is not painful. This is sometimes done as a part of the induction process.

**What is Oxytocin?**

Oxytocin is a naturally produced hormone that causes contractions of the uterus. Synthetic oxytocin, called Pitocin, can be used to start labor or to help labor that began on its own but has slowed down or stopped. Contractions usually start in about 30 minutes after Oxytocin is given.

**What are the risks associated with labor induction?**

During an induction the uterus can be over stimulated, causing it to contract too frequently. Too many contractions may lead to changes in the baby’s heart rate, uterine rupture (tearing) and other problems. If the heart rate cannot be fixed soon enough or a uterine rupture occurs, sometimes a cesarean section is necessary. Newer researcher shows that overall, inductions do not increase your chances of having a cesarean section or cause more problems for the baby.

**Is labor induction always effective?**

Sometimes labor induction does not work. If the induction does not work, it means you will have cesarean delivery. Your healthcare provider will tell you when your induction has not worked. This decision is based on how far you are dilated, how long you have been induced and the baby’s heart rate. The decision is different for each woman and each time point in labor.