

# Overdue? Myths and Fallacies.

If your due date has come and gone, chances are you're pretty eager to meet your baby. If you take a quick look online you will find a range of suggestions that are rumored to induce labour! Keep in mind that these methods haven't been medically proven (although there are several studies) and most of the popular legends are more myth than fact (sorry!). There are a couple of interesting exceptions and remember, it's important that you check with your LMC and get the green light before experimenting with any of these strategies.

## **Sex.**

While it may be the very last thing you want to do (or the first!) at this point in your pregnancy, sexual intercourse isn't harmful unless your LMC has advised you to avoid it for medical reasons. Semen contains prostaglandins, hormones that may help ripen (soften and open) the cervix, possibly leading to contractions. Similarly, an orgasm releases the hormone oxytocin, which stimulates the muscles of the uterus to contract. So, it's worth a try, if you are up for it!

## **Nipple stimulation.**

Nipple stimulation, which involves gently rubbing a nipple and areola for an hour, three times a day is said to trigger oxytocin and may lead to uterine contractions, much the same way breastfeeding produces the same effect in the early weeks postpartum.

In a 2005 Cochrane systematic review — more recent studies have not been done — researchers analyzed results from six clinical trials with a total of 719 women who were at least 37 weeks along. They found that those whose nipples had been stimulated — typically for between one and three hours a day, one nipple at a time — were 33 percent more likely to go into labour within the next 72 hours than women whose nipples were left alone. Nipple stimulation also reduced the risk of heavy bleeding after delivery by 84 percent.

However, we don't know how safe repeated nipple stimulation is for women whose pregnancies have complications. So it's best not to try this if you've had any problems during your pregnancy, like gestational diabetes, high blood pressure or pre-eclampsia.

## **Spicy food.**

It is believed that feasting on Pad Thai, chicken wings smothered in a hot spicy sauce or a lovely curry may fire up your digestive system and bowels and, consequently, your uterus. But I think heartburn would more than likely be the result rather than contractions and don't even get me started on the possibility of diarrhoea - not a great combination with contractions! Otherwise, eating spicy curry is harmless, so go ahead if you fancy trying it. It could be a good excuse for a night off from cooking,

## **Other foods.**

There are other foods that are rumored to help such as Bromelain, this is a combination of enzymes found naturally in fresh pineapple. It's believed that when pregnant women eat pineapple, bromelain softens the connective tissue of the cervix, bringing on labour. Excessive consumption may cause heartburn and diarrhoea!

Eating dates, several recent studies have shown that six dates a day starting at 36 weeks can help soften the cervix, reduce the need for medical induction and help promote a shorter labour (yay!) Researchers discovered that the people who ate six dates a day for 4 weeks had a shorter first stage of labour, a higher mean cervical dilatation, and more had intact membranes upon arrival at the hospital. (In other words, their cervix was riper for giving birth.)



Dates are also loaded with fiber to keep your digestive system running smoothly. And as a result, you're less likely to deal with pregnancy-related constipation. They are also a source of folate, which helps reduce the likelihood of birth defects. They also provide iron and vitamin K. Getting more iron in your diet can boost your energy levels and fight iron deficiency anemia. In addition, vitamin K helps a growing baby develop strong bones, and it can improve your muscle and nerve function. Dates are also a rich source of potassium, an electrolyte mineral that helps keep blood vessels relaxed and blood pressure low, so they may or may not help induce labour but there are heaps of other benefits for eating them.

### **Castor oil.**

This foul-tasting vegetable oil is essentially a laxative. When taken orally—you can try disguising the flavour by mixing the oil with juice, it can cause cramping in the intestines (ouch!!). This is supposed to lead to uterine muscle spasms and then labour. But, and it's a BIG but, the uncomfortable side effects of ingesting this liquid concoction may lead to severe cramps, diarrhoea and possible dehydration - stay away from this one.

### **Walking.**

It may not start labour, but walking aids its progression once your contractions have begun. Yet no research suggests that walking actually does this — because no such studies have been done. Researchers have never conducted a trial, for example, in which some at-term pregnant women walk and others don't, and compare what happens to whom and when. That said, many mothers believe that walking incited their labor. Walking makes your hips sway from side to side helping to correctly position the baby for birth and uses gravity to guide your baby further down into your pelvis. Word of caution: Don't walk to the point of fatigue—you need to conserve your energy for the birth.

### **A bumpy car ride.**

There is no scientific evidence that a bumpy car ride can help to bring on labour. However, many women believe it may help. It is thought that as you move around during a bumpy car ride, the rhythmic pressure of your baby's head on your cervix stimulates the release of oxytocin. This is the hormone that regulates contractions. Although there is no evidence that taking a bumpy car ride works, rest assured that it won't harm your baby either. Your baby is well-cushioned by your pelvis, tummy muscles and the amniotic fluid that surrounds her.

### **Hypnosis.**

Hypnotic relaxation has long been used to reduce pain perception in labour but there is no evidence that it works to get things going. The theory is that it may help people who are extremely anxious about giving birth. This is because feeling very stressed may prevent us from producing oxytocin, a hormone that's needed to start labour and help it progress.

Hypnotic relaxation is therefore thought to help those with high levels of anxiety relax so labour can start. But more research is needed into how effective it is. At the very least, using self-hypnosis podcasts, apps or downloads may help to relax you and take your mind off things if you're frustrated with being overdue.

Truly the safest 'natural' approach is time, Only about 2% of women remain pregnant more than one to two weeks past their due date. Just be patient and enjoy the last few days of your pregnancy - life will be super busy before you know it!