

LABOR STIMULATION MEASURES

There are several things you can do to try to start labor. They won't always be effective in starting labor; they seem to work best when the body is ready to go into labor and just needs a nudge to push it in that direction. None of these measures is harmful. You may choose to try one, or all, or any combination. If, after a few days, nothing has been effective in starting labor, wait a few more days and try again. Your body may be more ready to start labor later.

1. Nipple Stimulation causes the release of oxytocin which causes uterine contractions. Taking advantage of this physiological connection between breast and uterus brings a high degree of success either in starting labor or in ripening the cervix. The following measures might need to be repeated after a few hours or half a day.
 - A. Self-stimulation by the mother. Oil up your fingers with cooking oil (olive, corn, no perfumed oils) then roll your nipples with your fingers. Often within a few minutes you will feel contractions. Quit during a contraction, then start again once it's completed. You may need to continue this for hours. Alternate breasts.
 - B. Electric or manual breast pump. Use for 10-20 minutes per breast. The electric pumps can be rented from hospital supply rental agencies or lactation consultants.
 - C. Caressing and oral stimulation by your partner. Try this for as long as you find it effective and pleasant, or until contractions become strong.
 - D. Nursing a borrowed baby. Suckling by a 6-12 week old baby seems to be the most effective form of nipple stimulation. At this age babies are usually efficient nursers, but not too fussy to suckle at someone else's breast. The baby needs to be awake and not very hungry. A sleepy baby will not suck, and a hungry baby gets frustrated. The baby's fussy period is a good time to try, because the baby often wants simply to suck and will effectively stimulate the nipples. Suckling for at least 10 minutes on each side seems to be effective. Your breasts and hands should be clean.
2. Walking. The upright position combined with movement as in walking may help get labor started. It has been shown to be more effective, however, in augmenting labor than in starting it. Walk a mile or two at a time, depending on what you're used to. Don't exhaust yourself.
3. Sexual excitement, particularly orgasm, causes contractions of the uterus because oxytocin is released into the mother's bloodstream. Clitoral stimulation, even without orgasm, may also be effective. Prostaglandins, substances which stimulate muscles to contract, are present in semen and may act to contract the uterus when the semen contacts the cervix during intercourse. Intercourse, manual stimulation of the clitoris, and orogenital stimulation can be done as long as the membranes are intact. Blowing into the vagina should always be avoided. If these methods are chosen, make them as pleasant as possible. Try to forget your goal of starting labor and free yourself to enjoy the sexual experience.
4. Bowel stimulation. By stimulating and emptying the bowels, you can often start labor. It works by increasing the production of prostaglandins which are produced when smooth muscle contracts.

- A. Enema You can buy disposable enema units (Fleets enema) at the drugstore and give yourself an enema at home. Directions come with them.
- B. Castor oil This causes powerful contractions of the bowel and acts as a laxative. Castor oil has been used to induce labor with fair success for many years. It may cause painful cramping and diarrhea or even vomiting. Recommend you mix it with OJ and use a straw to suck it to the back of the throat so as not to taste it or coat the mouth. Also recommended to put a petroleum jelly on your anus to prevent a raw sore bottom.

5. Herbs

- A. Blue and Black Cohosh can be used to cause the uterus to contract. It can be purchased in a health food store in dry herb for tea (not recommended for this purpose), in capsules, and in tincture form. If using capsules, take 3 per dose. If using tincture, take 1 dropperful (about 30 drops) per dose. If desiring to start labor, take 3-4 times a day. If trying to boost a weak labor take ever 15-60 min.
- B. Evening Primrose Oil is a precursor to prostaglandin. It can be taken in gel cap form. One dose is at least 1000 mg gel cap. It is preferable to take for 2-3 weeks before desired delivery. Take 2 cap 2-4 times a day (start at 2 times a day for 1 week, then increase to 3 times a day for a week, then increase to 4 times a day till birth). It can also be applied to the cervix by putting a hole in one end of the gel cap and inserting it into the vagina (only when the membranes are intact) and lying with hips up for 20 mins.

6. Stripping of the membranes. This procedure has been shown in studies to be an effective way to start a labor. It also increases the production of prostaglandins. Allow 1-3 days for labor to begin. This procedure is done by the midwife during a vaginal exam. It separates the bag of waters from the cervix and lower uterine segment (depending on how far up the baby is). You must have an open cervix to perform this procedure. Some women experience it as painful, others as uncomfortable, and yet others as no big deal. It has not been shown to increase your risk of early-ruptured membranes or infection.

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