

## 9 Natural Ways to Induce Labor

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These techniques might help spur your body and baby into action.

Your due date has passed and no end is in sight. Is there anything you can do to give your baby an extra push towards birth? You've heard about how to induce labor naturally, but do these methods really work?

From old wives' tales to supposed scientific findings, many myths persist on how a woman can induce labor naturally. We are here to take a closer look at the top ten most popular, the most controversial, and the most effective methods out there to help you find some peace of mind as you finish out the last days of your pregnancy.



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### Understanding Your Due Date

Before we can talk about how to induce labor naturally, we need to discuss why some women are looking to jumpstart labor in the first place.

Outside of the weariness that comes with your third trimester, and feeling as if you've been pregnant forever, the most common reason women try to induce labor is that their due date has passed.

A due date is your doctor's or midwife's best guess for when your baby will be born. Throughout pregnancy, women use their due date as a goal to reach a joyous occasion they cannot wait to celebrate.

### But Keep In Mind

Due dates are surprisingly inaccurate — some studies report only 4 percent of women give birth on their due date.

For women who view their due date as a deadline, panic can set in when the baby does not arrive, and they immediately begin searching for ways to induce labor as quickly as possible.

But in most cases, everything is fine! Most women give birth between 37 and 42 weeks. Your baby remaining in the womb is a sign you have provided a wonderful and safe place for them to grow.

Experts suggest you avoid looking at your due date as a hard deadline and rather see it as a rough measurement used to treat you throughout your pregnancy. When a provider knows how long you have been pregnant, they can offer the appropriate tests and levels of care to ensure both you and your baby are healthy.

## **Is it OK to Induce Labor?**

As hard as it is to wait, most doctors and midwives will not suggest inducing labor until at least two weeks have passed from your due date. After two weeks past your due date, or beyond 42 weeks of pregnancy, the risk for complications rises. At this point, you will most likely have the option for a medical induction.

For mamas out there who are past their due date and are wanting to help their little one on their way to joining the world, techniques to naturally induce labor are not generally seen as harmful as long as your baby is confirmed to be at least 39 weeks old [\(1\)](#).

The exception to this is using the more potent methods, which we will talk about shortly, without the supervision of a healthcare professional.

## **Ways to Induce Labor Naturally - Reviewed**

We want all mothers to feel empowered! As we go over the ten most popular suggestions on how to induce labor naturally, we will see what the science says, give tips on how to implement these methods safely, and give our final verdict on their efficacy.

## 1. Sexual Intercourse

Let's start with the most talked-about method for inducing labor naturally — sexual intercourse.

You may be wondering if sex is even possible. Well, the answer is *yes* and it may be just the thing you need to encourage your baby out into the world.

What Does the Science Say?



There are a number of reasons people believe sexual intercourse induces labor. Outside of the anecdotal evidence, these theories exist:

- **Ejaculate:** Sperm and other biological components in ejaculate contain prostaglandins. Prostaglandins stimulate the cervix and may cause contractions [\(2\)](#).
- **Orgasm:** The uterus is stimulated during an orgasm and some believe this can help jumpstart contractions.
- **Oxytocin:** During sex, the chemical oxytocin is at an all-time high. Oxytocin is known to help contractions.

On paper, these theories make a lot of sense and many women swear by sex as a way to induce labor. You may benefit from encouraging your partner to make a deposit near your cervix and help you reach orgasm. However, there is little solid evidence proving sexual intercourse will induce labor with any sort of regularity.

Does this mean you shouldn't try sex out if you've passed your due date? Not at all! Most experts say you might as well go for it.

How to Use Sex to Induce Labor

Sex is generally safe throughout pregnancy until your water breaks, and couples should work together to determine how to be intimate in a way that is both pleasurable and comfortable.

Keeping the lines of communication open is important. It's also important for you as a mom to know your limitations, even if you are hoping sexual intercourse will help bring your pregnancy to its long-awaited end.

The Final Verdict

While the proof that sex works for labor induction is sparse, most doctors and midwives agree there is no harm in trying. Plus, the good hormones released during sex can relax stressed-out moms facing a rough last trimester.

## 2. Nipple Stimulation

Just as with sexual intercourse, nipple stimulation may sound like an extremely fun way to induce labor. If you are not careful, however, it may be dangerous.

What Does the Science Say?

Nipple stimulation involves rubbing or touching your nipples in a way that releases oxytocin in your body [\(11\)](#). Oxytocin is a formidable hormone responsible for causing the powerful contractions of childbirth. The drugs used to induce labor are synthetic forms of oxytocin.



The release of oxytocin through nipple stimulation is supported by scientific evidence. What's more, women who used nipple stimulation experienced the shortest labor and delivery times compared to women who didn't use this technique in one particular study [\(12\)](#).

How to Use Nipple Stimulation to Induce Labor

Nipple stimulation is simple. It involves gently massaging your areola and nipple with your hands. Use a rolling motion, place your fingers on the edge of your areola and massage inward [\(13\)](#).

### Warning

High levels of oxytocin can cause intense contractions that may be dangerous for you and your baby. Do not overstimulate your nipples. To be on the safe side, don't massage your nipples for more than 30 minutes to an hour and only massage one nipple at a time.

The Final Verdict

Nipple stimulation is an effective and natural method to induce labor. If you are worried about overstimulation, talk with a doctor or midwife about what techniques may work best for you.

### 3. Exercise



Out of all the methods on this list, exercise may be the one you'll want to implement regardless of your due date. After all, exercise can help keep you healthy throughout your pregnancy and beyond!

#### What Does the Science Say?

There is some scientific evidence to support exercise as a labor induction method. In one study, 32 percent of women reported physical activity as the trigger for their labor [\(3\)](#). Women who exercise consistently during pregnancy were also shown to begin labor earlier and have shorter labor overall [\(4\)](#).

#### How to Use Exercise to Induce Labor

There are a number of [exercises](#) you can try to help start labor. Here are our three favorites:

- **Walking:** This low-impact, low-risk exercise not only increases your heart rate (which can support contractions) but it also uses the force of gravity to help your baby drop lower down into your pelvis.
- **Squats:** Squats not only help your [baby drop](#), but they also strengthen your legs, thighs, and pelvic muscles. This can help you throughout the entire labor and delivery experience.
- **Birthing ball:** Stretch using a birthing ball to open up your pelvis and increase blood flow to the lower half of your body. This is a great option for moms struggling to move due to pain or discomfort.

#### The Final Verdict

Exercise is not a guaranteed way to start labor, but it has some scientific backing and so many other benefits for both you and your baby. We definitely suggest incorporating exercise into your entire pregnancy routine.

#### Warning

Make sure you discuss any new exercise regime with your doctor or midwife first.

## 4. Red Raspberry Leaf Tea

Of all the things you can ingest on this list, raspberry leaf tea is the most delicious! Could sipping a cup of warm tea really be the trick to getting your baby one step closer?

### What Does the Science Say?

Red raspberry leaf contains high levels of iron. Iron is essential to pregnancy because it supports healthy hemoglobin production. Hemoglobin transports oxygen throughout your body and to your baby [\(14\)](#).



The theory is that all the rich nutrients in red raspberry leaf tea help soften the cervix and prepare it for birth.

While red raspberry leaf tea is undeniably great for your iron levels, it does not mean it will help with labor. Unfortunately, most of the science linking this type of herbal tea to labor induction is weak at best.

### How to Use Red Raspberry Leaf Tea

Red raspberry leaf tea is safe to consume while pregnant. Simply boil water and prepare it as directed, but stop using if you notice any unpleasant side effects.

### The Final Verdict

Sipping some red raspberry leaf tea will promote healthy [iron levels](#) and help you relax, but it probably won't be any help in jump-starting labor.

## 5. Spicy Foods



Could inducing labor be as simple as visiting your favorite Indian or Mexican restaurant? Many women claim they went into labor after eating spicy foods.

### What Does the Science Say?

Eating spicy food to induce labor is actually just a myth. Sadly, scientists haven't discovered a food that will help your baby come any faster. When you take a look at some of the digestive changes caused by spicy foods, it's easy to understand why the myth persists.

Spicy food can heat up your digestive tract. Literally! As your digestive tract and bowels become agitated, some people believe the cervix and uterus can be impacted as well.

Spicy foods can also cause dehydration, which does lead to uterine muscle contractions [\(10\)](#).

### The Final Verdict

Spicy food has an extremely low chance of inducing labor. Unless you have an irresistible craving, you might also want to watch out for the heartburn and stomach problems spicy food can cause!

## 6. Massage

Start your labor off right with a massage! Just as acupuncture can stimulate your nerves and release hormones needed for labor to begin, sustained pressure on the right spots can do the same.



### What Does the Science Say?

[Massage therapy](#) has proven effective for many of pregnancies woes and can help women feel more comfortable — not to mention more pampered! But does it help start labor?

While studies show massage can help shorten labor and reduce pain [\(16\)](#), the amount of information about massage and labor induction is minimal.

### How to Use Massage to Induce Labor

Visit a licensed massage specialist or have a spouse or partner learn how to apply pressure at home carefully.

### The Final Verdict

Because massage has so many benefits for women in their last few weeks of pregnancy, we wholeheartedly suggest trying them! Nothing soothes stress away like a massage, and what woman doesn't feel better after some TLC?

However, if you are specifically hoping to use massage to induce labor, make sure you check with your doctor or midwife first.



## 7. Castor Oil

Castor oil is one of the most controversial labor induction methods on this list. It is also one of the most popular non-medical ways to induce labor [\(5\)](#).

Castor oil is a pale yellow liquid created by pressing castor beans. While it has many uses, most suggest castor oil induces labor because of its strong laxative properties. As your bowel becomes active and leans on the uterus, it is believed to stimulate contractions indirectly.



### What Does the Science Say?

Reviews are mixed when it comes to using castor oil. Some studies found castor oil has no real effect, especially since its activity is in the bowel, not the uterus [\(6\)](#). However, others found the opposite, showing an increase in the possibility of labor within 24 hours of ingesting castor oil.

What all the science agrees on is that castor oil can be dangerous if not used properly. Even in proper doses applied by a professional, castor oil leads to [nausea](#), [diarrhea](#), and [dehydration](#).

### How to Use Castor Oil to Induce Labor

Do not use castor oil to induce labor until you have exhausted all other options and have been given clearance by a medical professional.

To use castor oil, simply drink it. You can take it straight as a shot or mix it in with a juice or other drink. Do not ingest more than 2 tablespoons in a 24-hour period. Others swear by scrambling eggs in 2 tablespoons of castor oil and scooping up every last drop with toast.

Make sure to drink lots of water and be prepared for the powerful effect it will have on your bowels.

### The Final Verdict

We only suggest using castor oil under the supervision of a medical professional. Though the science is mixed, castor oil definitely seems to have a powerful effect and a high rate of success for those brave enough to try it.

### Warning

Just as castor oil can upset your whole digestive tract, it can impact your baby. The intensity of castor oil may lead to meconium aspiration, a condition where the baby's meconium (first stool) is passed before delivery and aspirated by your little one at the time of birth. This can lead to numerous complications for your baby after birth. While this is not a complication that has been proven, it is absolutely something to keep in mind.

## 8. Evening Primrose Oil

Evening primrose oil is extracted from a bright yellow flower known as the evening primrose [\(7\)](#). It is rich in a number of fatty acids used to treat a variety of conditions.

### What Does the Science Say?

According to the American Family Physician, it is unclear if evening primrose oil induces labor [\(8\)](#). Even if it does, some studies have found using evening primrose oil can make your labor last longer.



However, because of evening primrose oil's ability to metabolize prostaglandins, scientists haven't ruled it out completely. More studies need to be done.

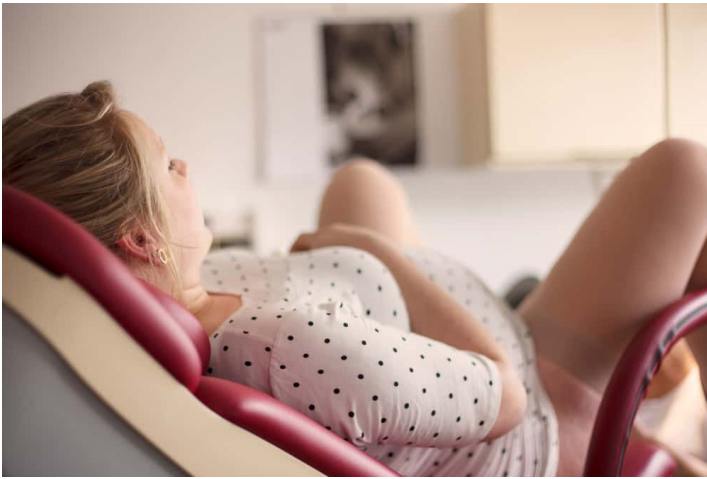
### How to Use Evening Primrose Oil to Induce Labor

Evening primrose oil comes in supplement capsules. You can begin taking them orally or insert them directly into your vagina. It should not be taken any earlier than your 38th week.

### The Final Verdict

Compared to castor oil, evening primrose oil has fewer risks. However, there has been concern that it may cause your water to break early, without labor starting [\(9\)](#). Like many other herbal supplements, it has little scientific proof to back it up as an effective method to induce labor, and may in fact be harmful.

## 9. Membrane Sweeping



Membrane sweeping doesn't sound like the most glamorous of methods, but it is effective for inducing labor.

Inside your uterus, the amniotic sac is attached by thin membranes. By sweeping a gloved finger around the amniotic sac, the membranes are swept away from your cervix and may release hormones, encouraging labor to begin [\(15\)](#).

What Does the Science Say?

Membrane sweeping is most effective for women past their due date and is commonly used in a hospital setting. There are no major risks associated with membrane stripping, though the experience can be quite uncomfortable.

### Using Membrane Sweeping to Induce Labor

Doctors or trained midwives should be the only ones to attempt membrane sweeping. If you are past your due date, set up an appointment and bring up membrane sweeping as a possible option.

### The Final Verdict

Membrane sweeping is effective and safe — however, it must be performed by a professional in a sterile environment, making it a more labor-intensive natural option.

## **A Word of Caution**

Every woman and pregnancy is different. Never start something new when it comes to your health without talking with your provider first.

They know you, and they have been monitoring every step of your pregnancy, so include them in your discussion before trying any of the methods on this list. Even if they are skeptical, they can assure you that what you try will not be dangerous to you or your baby.

## **How Did You Trigger Labor?**

The last few weeks and even days of pregnancy can be disconcerting and seriously uncomfortable. It's natural for moms to want to do all they can to give their babies a good push into the world, especially if they're a little "late." While there are some effective natural ways to move things along, other methods are simply myths or even a little dangerous.

## **Take Note**

The choice to use any of these techniques is yours, but we strongly urge working with a healthcare professional if you decide to attempt any home methods to induce labor quickly. We know there are moms out there with stories about how they were able to induce labor naturally. We want to hear them! What worked for you? What didn't? What got you through those last few days? Let us know in the comments below.



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