



STRIPPING MEMBRANES

Stripping membranes, sometimes called membrane sweeping, is a method used to try to start labor. The health care provider puts her or his finger into the cervix—the mouth of the uterus—and uses the finger to gently separate the bag of water from the side of the uterus near the cervix. It is easily done in the office during a regular pelvic exam.

How Does Stripping Membranes Work?

Hormones are released when the bag of water is separated from the uterus. These hormones may soften the cervix and prepare the uterus to contract. It may start contractions and help the cervix open.

Why Is Stripping Membranes Done?

Membrane stripping is done to try to start labor. Your health care provider may suggest stripping your membranes if continuing the pregnancy seems dangerous for your health or your infant's health. Sometimes membrane stripping is done to prevent a woman from going past 42 weeks of pregnancy. If you are pregnant after 42 weeks, there are more risks for the health of the infant. This is because the placenta may not provide enough food or oxygen to your infant when you are more than 42 weeks pregnant.

How Is Membrane Stripping Used to Start a Labor?

Your health care provider may offer to strip your membranes one time. Or your provider may offer to strip your membranes every week when you come into the office. If it is very important that you start labor, your health care provider may see you every 2 days in the office and strip your membranes each time.

What Should I Expect After Having My Membranes Stripped?

Having your membranes stripped will not put you into labor right away. It may not put you into labor at all. If you do have your membranes stripped, expect to be uncomfortable and slightly crampy during the procedure. You might feel mild cramps or contractions for up to 24 hours after your membranes have been stripped. You may also have slight spotting (a small amount of bleeding) for up to 3 days after your membranes are stripped. This bleeding can be reddish, pink, or brown and may be mixed with mucus.

Spotting and contractions are normal after stripping membranes although this is very rare, but if you have severe pain or bright red bleeding that soaks through a pad in an hour or is running down your leg, call your health care provider right away.

Are There Risks to Having Membranes Stripped?

- The cramping that may occur in the 24 hours after your membranes are stripped can make it hard to rest or sleep; this means that you might lose some sleep before actually going into labor.
- Some people worry that membrane stripping may cause the bag of water to break or cause mothers or babies to become sick. Studies have found that membrane stripping does not make them more likely.

How Well Does Membrane Stripping Work?

Membrane stripping is done because some studies show that labor may start sooner if membranes are stripped than if membranes are not stripped. This is especially true if a woman is already 41 weeks pregnant. The flip side of this handout lists some reasons for stripping membranes and some situations when stripping membranes is not a good idea.

You May Want to Try Having Your Membranes Stripped If:

- You are sick and your health care provider says it would be safer for you to have your infant now.
- Your infant is sick and your health care provider says it would be safer if your infant was born now.
- You are 42 weeks pregnant.
- You are almost 42 weeks pregnant and you are planning to have your infant at a birth center or at home where you will not be allowed to labor after 42 weeks of pregnancy.

Reasons You Would Not Want Your Membranes Stripped:

- You have been told that it is not safe to have your infant vaginally.
- You have had unexplained vaginal bleeding during your pregnancy.
- You have been told that you need to have your infant urgently and that it would be safest to have your labor induced by using medications.
- You want to let your pregnancy and labor unfold naturally and there is no medical reason to have your labor induced.
- If you have had a vaginal culture that says you have group B strep (GBS) in your vagina, you may not want to have your membranes stripped; there are no studies that have shown stripping membranes is harmful if you have GBS in your vagina and no studies that have shown it is safe if you have GBS in your vagina, so this is a decision you should make with your provider.

Other Things to Consider:

- Sometimes, at the end of pregnancy, it seems the pregnancy will never end—we can all become impatient and wish we could make labor begin; membrane stripping may cause you to lose sleep and be uncomfortable in the days before your labor starts—the best way to get ready for your infant and for labor is to remain as rested as possible.
- Most women deliver their babies by 41 weeks of pregnancy (fewer than 3 of 100 women will go past 42 weeks of pregnancy); membrane stripping to prevent going past 42 weeks of pregnancy is not usually needed.

FOR MORE INFORMATION**Cochrane Reviews**

www.cochrane.org/reviews/en/ab000451.html

This site summarizes all the studies that have been done on stripping membranes in a short paragraph that describes the evidence for how well stripping membranes works and what side effects can occur.

This page may be reproduced for noncommercial use by health care professionals to share with clients. Any other reproduction is subject to JMWH approval. The information and recommendations appearing on this page are appropriate in most instances, but they are not a substitute for medical diagnosis. For specific information concerning your personal medical condition, JMWH suggests that you consult your health care provider.