

Cervical Ripening at Home: What you need to know

Cervical ripening is a way to make your cervix soft and open in preparation for delivering a baby. This process is started by the release of hormones (prostaglandins) in your body. If you and your doctor decide to induce (start) labor — or if your cervix is not ripening on its own — you may need help stimulating those hormones. This handout explains how cervical ripening can be done at home.

How is it done?

Cervical ripening at home can be done during a simple procedure called **mechanical dilation**.

The pressure created by mechanical dilation tells your body to release the hormones needed to soften and open your cervix naturally.

During the procedure, your provider will use a catheter to place a medical balloon in your cervix. Then, you go home until it is time to go to the hospital for the next phase of labor.

What can I expect?

You will have an ultrasound to check on the baby's position and the amniotic fluid. The baby's heart rate will be monitored.

During the procedure, you may have some cramping and discomfort. After, you may experience mild-to-moderate cramping, pelvic pressure, a feeling of fullness, or even contractions. Warm showers, position changes, stretching, and Tylenol may help, if needed.

While at home, you may rest, walk, eat and drink, go to the bathroom, and do most normal, non-strenuous activities of daily living.

Do not take a bath, go swimming, soak in a hot tub, or have sexual intercourse while the catheter or balloon are in place.



When should I call about concerns?

Call the number in the blue box if:

- You have severe pain
- You have a fever of 100.4° F (38° C) or higher
- Your water breaks
- You have strong contractions every 5 minutes, or more frequently.
- You have heavy vaginal bleeding. (A small amount of bleeding is normal because of irritation to the cervix.)
- Your baby isn't moving normally
- The balloon falls out. (If this happens, place it in a bag and bring it with you when you return to the hospital.)
- You have any concerns about your symptoms

Go to Labor and Delivery on this date and time:

_____ / _____

Call this number with questions or concerns:

How do I prepare?

- **Ask questions.** Chat with your care team about what to expect. Don't be shy—ask how to spot anything unusual and when to call them.
- **Line up support.** You'll need someone to drive you to and from your appointment and ideally stay with you at home afterward.
- **Get comfortable.** Gather things that help you relax — like cozy clothes, a heating pad, snacks, and maybe a good book or playlist.



How do I manage labor pain?

1 Move around and get comfortable

- Try lying on your side, propping yourself with pillows, or sitting with your feet up.
- Take short walks. Gentle movement can ease discomfort and help things progress.
- Use a birthing ball. Rocking or circling your hips on the ball can relieve pressure and back pain.

2 Try heat or cold

- A heating pad or warm compress on your lower back or belly can soothe cramps. Just keep it low and avoid placing it directly over any medical devices.
- A warm shower is relaxing and can ease tension—just be careful getting in and out.
- A cold pack on your back or pelvis might feel good too. Wrap it in a cloth. Do not put ice directly on your skin.

3 Breathe and relax

- Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. Focus on relaxing your belly.
- Picture something peaceful. Imagine a calm place or moment to help your body unwind.
- Tense and release. Start at your toes and work your way up, tightening and relaxing each muscle group.
- Use an app for guided meditations or calming audio. Many are made just for pregnancy.

4 Distract yourself

- Do something you enjoy. Watch a show, read, listen to music or a podcast.
- Chat with your support person or call a friend—it can lift your mood.
- Get creative. Try journaling, knitting, or doodling to keep your mind busy.

5 Use medications safely

- Tylenol (acetaminophen) is safe and effective. Take 1000 mg before your balloon placement, and another 1000 mg 4 to 6 hours later if needed (max 3000 mg/day).
- If your pain is intense, your provider might prescribe something stronger like oxycodone. Only take it exactly as directed.

6 Stay in touch with your care team

- Keep their number handy. Call if you're unsure about anything.
- Know when to get help. If pain is severe, or you have any of the symptoms listed on page 1, call right away or go to the hospital.

Tips to help you stay comfortable

- **Stay hydrated.** Drink plenty of water unless your care team says otherwise.
- **Eat balanced, light meals** to keep up your energy.
- **Lean on your support system** for company and reassurance.
- **Remind yourself this is a step towards meeting your baby.** A positive mindset can help lessen anxiety and discomfort.

How do I decide?

To help you make a decision, see the information about the possible risks, benefits, and alternatives below.

Possible benefits	Risks and possible complications	Alternatives
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ability to be at home while induction of labor begins• Shorter time in Labor and Delivery before delivery• Reduced cost• Reduced chance of needing a C-section	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cramping and discomfort during placement• Vaginal bleeding• Early rupture of membranes• Infection• The dilator balloon comes out too soon	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• No induction of labor• Scheduled induction of labor in Labor and Delivery services.

Frequently asked questions

How long will the balloon be in place?

The balloon is typically left in place for several hours, sometimes overnight, or until it falls out on its own or is removed by your care provider.

Is it normal to have cramping or spotting?

Mild cramping, pelvic pressure, or light spotting is common while the balloon is in place. Severe pain or heavy bleeding is not normal — **seek medical attention if this occurs.**

Can I eat or drink?

Most patients may continue to eat and drink as usual, but follow any specific instructions from your care team.

Can I go to the bathroom?

Yes, you can and should use go to the bathroom as needed, but avoid pulling or tugging on the balloon tubing.

Will I be able to sleep?

You might find it difficult to sleep due to discomfort. Using relaxation techniques, comfort measures, and appropriate pain relief can help.

Will the balloon fall out?

If the cervix dilates enough, the balloon may fall out on its own. This is usually a sign that the process is working as intended.



Starting cervical ripening with a balloon dilator at home might feel like a big step — but with the right information and support, it can be a really empowering part of your birth journey.

Using the comfort tips in this guide can help you stay more relaxed and manage any discomfort. Remember, your body knows what it's doing. Listen to your body, take breaks when you need to, and don't hesitate to reach out to your care team with questions.

Your comfort and safety matter most. You're not doing this alone — your provider is just a call away, and support is always within reach.