

Spontaneous rupture of membranes (SROM)

This leaflet explains more about what happens when your “waters” break naturally after 37 weeks, including any recommendations you may receive, the choices you can make, the risks involved and what you can expect.

What does it mean when my waters break?

Your baby develops and grows inside a bag of fluid called the amniotic sac. When it's time for your baby to be born, the sac usually breaks and the amniotic fluid drains out through your vagina. This is your waters breaking.

When your waters break naturally, you may feel a slow trickle or a sudden gush of water you cannot control. You may need to wear a maternity pad (but not a tampon) and put a protective sheet on your bed, as your waters will continue leaking until the birth. The water may be clear, pale yellow, or pinkish (a little bloodstained).

Labour usually starts with contractions, but sometimes the waters break before the contractions start. If this happens, about 6 in 10 women will start to labour within 24 hours (NICE, 2022).

What are my options?

- Induction of labour at 24 hours after your waters break. This is recommended in national and local guidance (NICE, 2022).
- Immediate induction of labour. This option is dependent on the activity of the unit.
- Wait for longer than 24 hours. Acknowledging the increased risk of infection, an individualised plan will be made by your doctor for monitoring.

What are the risks?

A possible route of infection develops when the sac 'breaks' and the fluid starts to leak out. After this happens, there is a slightly increased risk (up to 1 in 100) of your baby getting a serious bacterial infection compared with only 1 in 200 when the membranes are intact (NICE, 2022).

Perinatal Outcome	Induction	Expectant
Maternal infection (Chorioamnionitis or endometritis)	5.4 in 100	11 in 100
Confirmed neonatal sepsis	1.2 in 100	2.2 in 100
Caesarean section	No difference	
Serious risk for the baby (stillbirth, neonatal death)	No difference- very rare	
Serious risk for the mother (severe infections, intensive care, etc.)	No difference- very rare	

How would labour be induced?

Please see our Induction of Labour leaflet (QR code at the bottom of this leaflet) or speak to a midwife or doctor for more information.

What should I do whilst I am waiting for my labour to start?

Get plenty of rest and eat and drink normally.

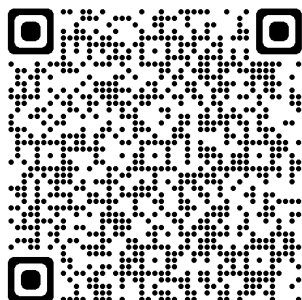
- Check your temperature every four hours while you are awake, and inform your midwife if your temperature is above 37.5 degree Celsius.
- Avoid having sex as this will increase the risk of you getting an infection in your womb.
- Wear a sanitary pad and change it regularly. Do not wear a tampon as this increases the risk of infection.
- You can have a bath or shower as usual; this will not increase the risk of infection.
- While you are waiting for your labour to start you may have a 'show'. This is a lump or strands of mucous that is sometimes streaked with blood.

Reasons to contact us immediately from home

- If the colour of the water (liquor) is no longer clear or straw coloured and becomes brown or green (meconium) or the odour changes.
- If you feel unwell, feverish or have flu-like symptoms
- If your baby is moving less than normal
- If regular contractions begin or you have abdominal pains

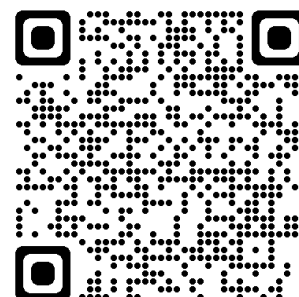
Useful sources of information

NICE guidelines – Early stage of labour information



Tommy's - what to expect when your waters break leaflet

St George's Hospital Induction of Labour leaflet



Contact us

If you need further advice or have any concerns, please contact us on the **Maternity Helpline 020 8725 2777**

Additional services

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS can offer you advice and information when you have comments or concerns about our services or care. You can contact the PALS team on the advisory telephone line Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday from 2pm to 5pm.

A Walk-in service is available:

Monday, Tuesday and Thursday between 10am and 4pm

Friday between 10am and 2pm.

Please contact PALS in advance to check if there are any changes to opening times.

The Walk-in and Advisory telephone services are closed on Wednesdays.

PALS is based within the hospital in the ground floor main corridor between Grosvenor and Lanesborough Wing.

Tel: 020 8725 2453 **Email:** pals@stgeorges.nhs.uk

NHS UK

The NHS provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make decisions about your health.

Web: www.nhs.uk

NHS 111

You can call 111 when you need medical help fast but it's not a 999 emergency. NHS 111 is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Calls are free from landlines and mobile phones.

Tel: 111

AccessAble

You can download accessibility guides for all our services by searching 'St George's Hospital' on the AccessAble website (www.accessable.co.uk). The guides are designed to ensure everyone – including those with accessibility needs – can access our hospital and community sites with confidence.



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