

Membrane Sweeping



Membrane sweeping is a method used to help your body go into labor. The membranes, also called the amniotic sac or bag of water, surround your baby in your uterus (womb) during pregnancy. The membranes hold the amniotic fluid (water) that protects your baby and gives your baby room to move around.

To sweep the membranes, your health care provider will put a gloved finger into your vagina and then into your cervix (the opening to the uterus). The gloved finger will be used to gently separate the bag of water from the sides of the uterus near the cervix. Membrane sweeping is easily done in the office during a regular pelvic exam.

Why is membrane sweeping done?

Your health care provider may suggest sweeping the membranes to prevent you from going too far past your due date. If you do not go into labor more than 1 or 2 weeks past your due date your baby may need more food and nutrients than the placenta can provide. If that happens, labor may be harder for the baby.

How does membrane sweeping work?

Hormones are released when the bag of water is moved slightly from where it lies next to the sides of the uterus. These hormones help soften the cervix and prepare the uterus to have contractions. Membrane sweeping may start some contractions and help the cervix open.

How many times can I have membrane sweeping done to start a labor?

Your health care provider may offer to sweep the membranes one time. Or your provider may offer to sweep the membranes every week at the end of your pregnancy when you come for a visit. If it is very important that you start labor, your health care provider may see you every 2 days in the office for a few visits and sweep your membranes each time.

What should I expect after membrane sweeping?

Membrane sweeping does not usually start labor right away. If you do have membrane sweeping, expect to feel some cramping during the procedure. You might feel mild cramps or contractions for up to 24 hours afterward. You may also have slight spotting (a small amount of bleeding on your underwear) for up to 3 days. This bleeding can be reddish, pink, or brown and may be mixed with mucus. Spotting and cramping after membrane sweeping are normal. Although it is very rare, if you have severe pain or bright red bleeding that soaks through a pad or is running down your leg, call your health care provider right away.

Are there risks to having membrane sweeping?

The cramping that may occur in the 24 hours after membrane sweeping 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 sweeping may cause the bag of water to break. Studies have found this is not true. There are no studies that have shown sweeping membranes is harmful if you have group B strep (GBS). You and your health care provider can choose membrane sweeping if you have a positive GBS culture and want to have membrane sweeping.

How well does membrane sweeping work?

Membrane sweeping is done because studies found that labor often starts a few days sooner in women who have membrane sweeping compared with women who did not have membrane sweeping. This is especially true if a woman is already 41 weeks pregnant.



What are reasons I might want to have membrane sweeping?

You may want to try having membrane sweeping if you:

- Are at or past your due date
- Are almost 42 weeks pregnant and are planning to have your baby at a birth center or at home where you will not be allowed to labor after 42 weeks of pregnancy

What are reasons I should not have membrane sweeping?

You would not want membrane sweeping if you:

- Have been told that it is not safe to have your baby vaginally
- Have had vaginal bleeding during your pregnancy
- Have been told that you need to have your baby right away and that it would be safest to have your labor induced by using medications
- Want to let your pregnancy and labor unfold naturally, and there is no medical reason your labor should start soon

For More Information

Cochrane: Membrane Sweeping for Induction of Labor

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

Evidence Based Birth: The Evidence on Membrane Sweeping

<https://evidencebasedbirth.com/evidence-on-membrane-sweeping/>

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