

39 – 40 Weeks

answers to your pregnancy questions

Post-term pregnancy

A post-term pregnancy is defined as one that lasts longer than 42 weeks. A pregnancy often lasts longer than expected because the exact time when you became pregnant is not known. If your due date has passed, your doctor will do testing to check your baby's health and your visits will likely be more frequent. Your physician will discuss options with you based on the well-being of both you and your baby, including induction of labor if appropriate.

Induction of labor

In some cases, your physician may recommend that steps be taken to begin labor rather than waiting for it to begin naturally. Before labor induction, your physician will review the baby's gestational age, how your pregnancy is going and possible risks for you and your baby.

If labor induction is decided upon, several different methods may be used. If the cervix has not begun to thin or open on its own, your provider may choose to use medications or special dilators to help soften or widen the cervix the evening before beginning labor induction. A hormone called oxytocin (Pitocin) may be given through your IV site to stimulate contractions.

Your contractions and your baby's heartbeat will be monitored while this medication is being administered to ensure that contractions do not begin to come too close together or cause too much stress to your baby. If your water has not broken already, your doctor may make a small hole in the amniotic sac. This may then increase the contractions or make them stronger.

There are some risks associated with induction of labor, which your doctor will discuss with you in advance of making this decision with you.

39
WEEKS

40
WEEKS

at 39–40 weeks of pregnancy:

Your baby's head may have already dropped into position in your lower pelvis. At 40 weeks, most babies will weigh somewhere between 6 and 9 pounds and be 18–20 inches long. At birth, the brain will weigh about 14 ounces and will continue to increase in size and weight.



Springfield Clinic's Center for Women's Health
217.528.7541 • 800.444.7541

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What to expect after your baby is born

Immediately following the birth of your baby, both you and your baby will be closely monitored. Both of you will have your vital signs checked frequently for the first couple of hours after delivery. The hospital staff will frequently assess the amount of bleeding you have to make sure it is not unexpectedly heavy and will press on and massage your uterus. This may be uncomfortable, however, it is important to help keep your uterus in a contracted state after delivery.

Sometimes medication is given to keep the uterus firm. If your uterus does not remain firm and contracted, bleeding may become heavy and require other treatment measures. You may experience shaking of your whole body that comes and goes the first few hours after birth. This is normal, and although you may not be cold, you may be offered a warm blanket to help with this. Your baby will be assessed immediately after being born. If special medical treatments are needed for your baby, it may be taken to the nursery, but most often your baby will be able to stay with you. Hospital staff will continue to check the baby's temperature and heart rate. You will be given the opportunity to breastfeed for the first time and assistance will be provided if needed.

The length of your hospital stay will depend on the type of delivery you experience as well as other factors, including your preference. Most insurance coverage allows for a two-day hospital stay following a vaginal delivery and a three-day hospital stay following a cesarean birth. Some parents prefer to leave the hospital in just 24 hours after having their baby. If your delivery has been without complications and your pediatrician does not feel that your baby needs to be monitored closely for the full two days, this may be an option for you. Be sure to let the physician for both you and your baby know if this is what you wish to do.

Baby blues

Seventy to eighty percent of mothers will experience what is commonly known as the "baby blues" after having a baby. Usually about two to three days after birth, you may notice feelings you never expected to have at this time in your life. You may cry for no reason, have trouble sleeping or making choices and even question if you can handle caring for this new baby. You may feel angry, alone, anxious and weak. These feelings often go away in anywhere from a few hours to a couple of weeks. If these feelings do not start to fade after about a week or begin to worsen rather than get better, you should contact your physician.

SPECIAL TESTS TO MONITOR THE HEALTH OF YOUR BABY

Your physician may order special testing to monitor the health of your baby. Two of these tests that may be performed in the office are called non-stress test (NST) and biophysical profile (BPP).

During a non-stress test two, belts will be placed around your abdomen. Ultrasound devices monitor the baby's heartbeat and any uterine contractions you may have. You will be given a button to push when you feel the baby move. When the baby moves, the heart rate increases. This increase in the heart rate is a sign of your baby's good health.

A biophysical profile is a test performed by ultrasound. It assesses four areas: the baby's breathing movements, body movements, muscle tone and the amount of amniotic fluid (referred to as the amniotic fluid index or AFI). Each area is given a score from 0 to 2. Sometimes these tests are done on the same day and the NST is given a score of 0 to 2 as well. When this is done, a score of 8 to 10 is considered normal and a sign of your baby's good health.

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