

Chilled Mama's
guide to creating a

Last weeks of pregnancy plan

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There is a lot of waiting in the last few weeks. People start to ask if you've had it yet.

*Each twinge, you think 'Is this it?' Yet there is a five week window of 'term'. Only 4% of babies come on their **estimated** due date, and as many come after that time as come before.*

Make a plan to cope with that time, to keep yourself patient, and be in the best mindset for birth and beyond.

Last weeks of pregnancy plan

Mental preparation

Keep up your relaxation, meditation & affirmations. These will all help you keep calm now and in labour. Daydreaming is good for late pregnancy. As you move towards your baby's birth day your cerebral cortex (thinking brain) will slow down and the oldest part of your brain will take over. Respected midwife Tricia Anderson recommends women 'embrace the doolally-ness of late pregnancy'.

Practical prep.

This is a good time to cook a few extra dishes to put in the freezer. Or book online shopping for a few weeks in advance. Get your bag packed. Make sure your partner knows how to use the washing machine. Have a change of bed sheets in a stack.

Enjoy yourself.

Don't sit at home waiting. Go to the cinema. Lunch in a café. All the things that will be a bit harder with a very young baby. It is highly unlikely that your waters will break. Only 10% go at the beginning of labour, 80% go when pushing the baby out.

Pamper yourself.

In the past and in other cultures pregnant women are treated to special foods, massages and other rituals. We don't have that in the modern West so do things that pamper you. Massages. Movies that make you laugh or sigh with happiness. (Not sad or frightening ones.) Cuddle, snuggle, kiss, stroke. Get that oxytocin flooding through your body every day. See your mum/sister/friend – anyone who makes you feel super secure and loved.

Tune into your baby.

We only have a few times of feeling a baby growing inside us. Treasure these last days of connection. Play games with your baby, pushing their limbs. Massage your bump. Sing to them. Daydream about them. Tell them how much you are looking forward to seeing them.

Enjoy time with your partner.

Let them know how you value them. Soon you will both be under the influence of sleep deprivation and that can put a strain on relationships. Have a meal out. Watch movies. Make a birth playlist or two.

When you're in labour, everything you do to ease the sensations, to lessen them, will help labour move on, whether it is rocking, walking, singing.

So in early labour, or pre-labour, don't do things to make the sensations greater, or to hold on to them, however tempting it may be. It's likely to have the opposite effect.

Rest. Eat well. If your surges fade away, that's okay. It will happen.

Cathy Williams

Dealing with other people

Why does everyone call you to ask if you've had the baby? As if you wouldn't tell them! Put a note on your social media. Stick some memes up. (I have some in a photo album on my facebook page.) Get your partner to answer the phone, and tell them you are in the bath.

Listen to your instincts

In labour your body will tell you to do what you need to do to help labour progress, and sometimes it is a chicken dance, or lunge, stand up or lie down. We tend to not to be very good at listening to our body. Spend some time each day turning inward and thinking 'what do I need?' 'what is my body saying to me?' Maybe you will notice that your feet are aching and you should put your feet up, or that you are thirsty or hungry.

Patience

This is sooo hard. You are fat, and tired. Your back aches and your feet are swelling up and you just want to meet your baby. Every twinge you think 'is this it?' There's no room to eat. You need to take a pee every 20 minutes. Take a deep breath. Relax. Try and find a bit of zen. There is nothing you can do. The latest research suggests [labour is triggered by the baby's lungs](#) secreting a protein when they are fully developed. So you just have to wait. Go listen to your hypnobirthing, or stare at the moon, or eat another tub of Ben and Jerry's. Read this beautiful article: [Last days of pregnancy: a place of inbetween](#).

Coping with twinges

The more babies you have the more twinges or false alarms. You can have an hour or two of contractions/surges, every day for a couple of weeks. This is normal. Sorry but it is. The good news is that it is your body doing some of the pre-labour prep. With second and subsequent babies your body is particularly good at doing that. Having contractions/surges that then disappear is a sign that your body is working really well: it is prepping the cervix, nudging the baby's position. Imagine that labour is like a train journey. It doesn't start when you get on at the platform. There has been prep work at the train depot, and then a journey to the station.

Use them to practise for labour, which helps it become automatic: relax, drop your shoulders, and breathe out in a steady pattern. Then carry on with ordinary life.

Don't try and hold on to these surges. You can't will yourself into labour. You'll just tire yourself out.

Showtime?

Sometimes you may get a 'show' (bloodied, mucousy discharge). This is part of your 'plug' in your cervix. It can start to come away in bits weeks before labour, and continues during labour. (You may not get any before labour, that's fine.) Bits of show are likely to come away after sex or a sweep. It is a sign your cervix is doing something, but not necessarily going into labour, yet. Other pre-labour signs that mean your body is getting ready and you may go into labour in the next hour, or the next week, are: feeling nauseous, diarrhoea.

Is this it?

So how do you know you are in labour? Your surges/waves/contractions get longer, stronger and closer together and this continues over time. If you have three hours of surges that are similar distance apart, or erratic, this is not labour. If you have two hours of surges a similar distance apart and then they become longer, stronger and closer together, and continue, then yes this is it. If you have one hour of surges and they are coming closer and stronger and longer, that may well be labour. Some women experience labour down their legs. You may have been told to call the midwife/go to hospital when your contractions are 3 in 10 minutes or 3 mins apart. This is a minimum, not a finishing line. Wait for an hour or more (especially if baby number one). See if this pattern continues. If it increases go in. If it stays the same, or slows, rest.

Scans/monitoring

More and more women are being sent for scans in late pregnancy, for a big bump, small bump etc. Ask questions about the scan and about the potential outcomes/course of action. Use your BRAIN:

What are the Benefits?

What are the Risks?

What are the Alternatives?

What do my Instincts tell me?

What if we do Nothing? (for now, for a day, for several days, for longer.)

If you have concerns or niggling worry about your baby, you can always contact a midwife. Don't be put off by anyone. Sometimes you might need to put your foot down. You can ask for extra monitoring. It is your baby. You are in charge.

Starting off/induction

It is a good idea to have a think about what you will do if/when you get past your estimated due date. Your midwife may offer sweep at 40 or 41 weeks. At 40 weeks she is likely to offer an appointment with consultant at 41 weeks to discuss induction. What decision will you make? You can agree, or decline at first and decide to consider a little down the line. Or just decline.

Your options:

- accept the appointment (knowing that you can cancel it or simply not turn up);
- decline the appointment but tell the midwife that if you are still around at 41 weeks you will call her to make an appointment;
- decline any appointment about induction until 42 weeks.

You don't need to argue or explain, just thank the midwife but politely decline. (See my handout on 'Negotiating your care'.) You are able to change your mind at any time, for example to cancel appointment or request one.

There is so much to say about induction, enough to write a whole book, so I'm not going to go into it all. Research.

Sweeps (aka stretch and sweep, cervical sweep)

This involves the midwife putting her finger in your cervix, and moving it around to stretch the cervix and sweep her finger around between the amniotic sac and the cervix. Some women don't have a problem with sweeps, some women find them uncomfortable. Your midwife might not be able to do a sweep if your cervix is pointing back and is hard and closed. A sweep is likely to give you cramps, a show, and very probably surges, but these may not lead to labour. If you have surges or cramps after a sweep but don't go into labour that is fine. Your body just wasn't ready. I met a woman who had 17 sweeps over four weeks.

Research says two sweeps over several days slightly increases your chance of going into labour in the next three days. There is a small chance that it may lead to infection, and your waters breaking, especially if you are over 1cm dilated. The cervix is not a crystal ball. You could be closed, hard and pointing back and go into labour the next day, or be soft and 3cm and be wandering around for several days.

'Natural induction'

In many ways this is an oxymoron as any interference in the physiology is not natural. There are some non-pharmacological things you can try. They might lead to surges but not labour, which can tire you out. They are only likely to 'work' if you were about to go into labour anyway.

Forget pineapple. It is a uterine irritant but it won't give your cramps, let alone start labour.

Hot curry or castor oil will bring on surges by giving you diarrhoea, but do you want to start labour after hours of induced surges and diarrhoea? And it may not lead to labour.

Clary Sage is powerful and may bring on surges but it is likely that they won't turn into anything.

Two best tips are

- Bounce on your exercise ball. For hours. And do some rotations too. This will have a similar effect to a sweep, as it causes the baby's head to put pressure on the cervix. Works best if baby's head is engaged. Long walk can have similar effect.
- There is an acupuncture point on your hand. Message me.

All of these are only likely to work if you are close to going into labour anyway. Best thing you can do is to relax and wait for things to start naturally. And have an oxytocin party (see below).

Induction

In the UK induction is offered (offered, you can decline) to low risk women after 41 weeks (often 41+3 or +5), and to some women such as have 'big' baby or are older, earlier than that. It is always your choice. The research is not clear. There is some indication that stillbirth rates may rise after 42 weeks (induction offered several days before as it can take several days to take effect), but the risk is still small. The most commonly quoted rates are 1 in a 1000 at 40 weeks & 2 in a 1000 at 42 weeks (the same as it was at 38 weeks), though there is a range of results, and individual factors increase or decrease that risk. The risk of stillbirth at 43 weeks is roughly the same as it was at 37 weeks.

There is some research that says induction does not increase your chance of a caesarean, and other research to say it does. It is worth knowing that induction can be swift and straightforward or it can take several days, to take effect, and if after three–five days of induction you are not dilating then caesarean will be recommended. Induction does increase your chance of needing intervention and your baby needing to go to NICU.

It is a very personal decision. Spend time considering what is right for you and what you would accept, and when. Some women want to go for induction and some wait. Approximately 96% of women will have had their baby by 42 weeks, and most of the rest will have their baby by 43 weeks. There are some who go on to have their baby at 44 or 45 weeks. For some it is the right decision to go for induction earlier. Follow your gut.

Book on induction by midwife Sara Wickham, and check out her website sarawickham.com . Also [Why induction matters](#) by Dr Rachel Reed. There is a good [facebook group](#) around induction.

Just remember everything is your choice, your decision. It is your body, your baby.

Have an oxytocin party

This is one of the best things you can do in the last few weeks. It will help your body to release the labour hormones oxytocin and endorphins. It has no negative side effects; it won't tire you out or give you the runs. And it will help you enjoy your last few days and weeks, and bring you closer to your partner. It won't put you into labour, but it can help your body to do the pre-labour prep work. Having an oxytocin party in labour is just what you need to keep labour flowing.

To release oxytocin you need to feel safe and loved. It is also more likely to be released when it is dark (melatonin increases the release of oxytocin). So what do you need to feel safe and loved? Here are some ideas:

- During the day see your mum, dad, or your best friend, someone who makes you feel really loved and safe. Cuddle your older children. Smell them.
- In the afternoon/early evening watch a funny movie. It needs to be one that makes you laugh so much you almost wet yourself (creates a release in your bottom).
- Romantic lighting, nice food.
- Dance music: get your hips moving and rotating.
- Laugh, tell jokes, whisper sweet nothings.
- Slow dance.
- Kiss, touch, stroke ... (oxytocin is released by all of these, especially on the neck, chest, lips, breasts, and genitals)
- Get your partner to do that thing that makes your knees wobble
- And if you are up to it, sex, or foreplay. Oxytocin is released in orgasm. Seamen is full of prostaglandins which soften the cervix (that's what the pessary in induction is made of, prostaglandins).

There is no limit to the number of times you can have an oxytocin party.

Now turn these ideas into a personalised plan.



Affirmations

for going past your estimated due date. Put them on cards around the house.

My baby isn't a cake.

Term is 37-42 weeks.

Flowers blossom in their own time.

My baby is choosing their birth date.

Oxytocin is our friend.

Dark, quiet, full of love.

Follow your instincts.

Turn inwards to help your baby out.

Let it happen.

My baby is happy and healthy.

Relax.

I am a strong, capable woman.

Millions of women have done this before.

I can put myself in the best position for all to go well.

My last weeks of pregnancy plan

In the last few weeks of pregnancy I/we will

Mental Prep

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Practical prep (meals, food shopping, hair cut)

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Enjoy yourself (café, cinema, friends)

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Pamper (bath, massage, relaxation)

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Dealing with people (social media, texts/phone calls)

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Listen to my instincts (how often and when will you tune in)

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Cope with twinges (strategies)

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Oxytocin party plan

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Thoughts about interventions

How I feel about sweeps:

When/in what circumstance would I request/accept one?

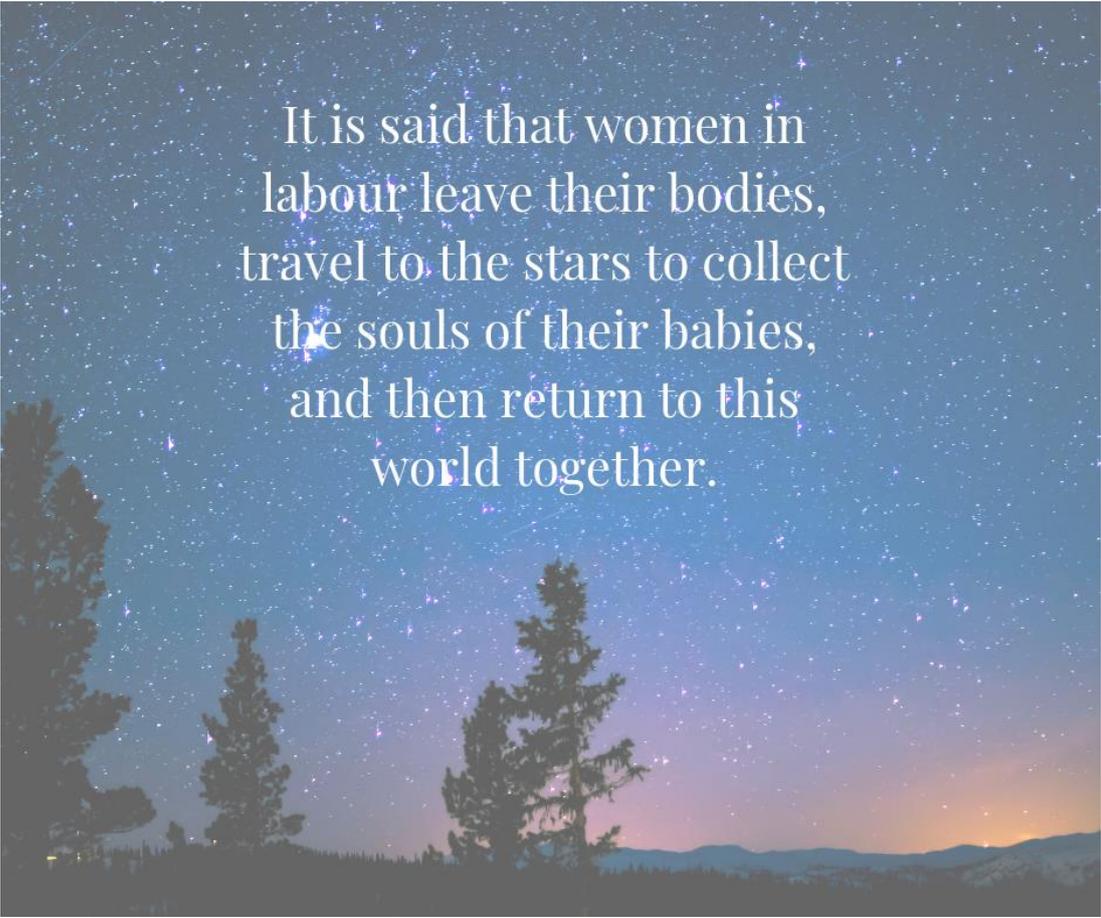
How I feel about meeting with consultant obstetrician/midwife to discuss induction?

If I decide to have a meeting, when would I like that to happen? What would I want to discuss?

If I decide it is right for me to not wait, what non-pharmacological methods of getting labour started would I try?

If I decide it is right not to wait,

- What questions will I ask?
- How can I work with the process? (oxytocin party)
- How would I like to be supported?



It is said that women in
labour leave their bodies,
travel to the stars to collect
the souls of their babies,
and then return to this
world together.