

# Membrane “sweep” and “cervical stretch”

## What is a membrane sweep?

The amniotic sac or ‘bag of waters’ is a double membrane in which baby grows whilst inside your uterus (womb). The amniotic sac is filled with fluid and helps keep baby safe from injury during pregnancy, and allows room for baby to move. The amniotic sac is what leaks when you hear someone say that their “waters have broken”.

Membrane sweeping (or stripping) is an old method of induction that was first documented in the year 1810. It encourages your body to produce and release hormones called prostaglandins which occur naturally in the lining of your uterus. Prostaglandins help to induce (or start) labour by encouraging the cervix to soften and shorten (ripen). This allows the cervix to open and might encourage contractions (labour) to start. It can also reduce the need for other methods to start labour.

## Who can have a membrane sweep?

You might be offered a membrane sweep if your pregnancy is at term and you have had no problems during your pregnancy.

Membrane sweeping is not recommended if your membranes have broken (ruptured), your baby’s head is not engaged, you have a low lying placenta, or your cervix is closed.

Your midwife will explain the procedure and ask your permission. You and your partner need to feel fully informed of the benefits, risks and expected outcomes of having a “stretch and sweep” performed.

## How is a membrane sweep done?

A membrane sweep is a vaginal examination. Your midwife will put a finger just inside your cervix and make a circular sweeping movement to separate the membranes from their attachment to your cervix.

Your midwife will check if your cervix is soft, beginning to dilate and effacing (thinning). A cervix which is high and closed is not ideal for a membrane sweep.

## What is a cervical stretch?

After the membrane sweep your midwife attempts to stretch your cervix as she removes her finger from your cervix.

## Is having a membrane sweep and cervical stretch uncomfortable?

Sweeping the membranes can be uncomfortable for some women but should not be painful. You may experience period-like cramping (or irregular contractions), and you may not progress into labour.

It is quite common to experience a ‘bloody show’ or mucousy blood loss after a stretch and sweep. This will not cause any harm to your baby and it will not increase the chance of you or your baby getting an infection. As the “bloody show” stops it can change from red to brown in colour.

[continued]

## **How effective is a stretch and sweep?**

Having a stretch and sweep is no guarantee that labour will begin. If your labour is going to start it will usually do so within 48 hours of the stretch and sweep.

If the stretch and sweep does not bring on labour, then an induction of labour may need to be considered.

## **What are the risks of having a membrane sweep and cervical stretch?**

A membrane sweep and cervical stretch is a safe and effective way of stimulating contractions provided your due date has been accurately assessed.

Membrane stripping comes with the risk of rupturing the amniotic sac (breaking your waters). It may trigger irregular contractions that don't lead to labour.

There is no evidence to suggest that having a stretch and sweep increases the risk of infection to either the mother or baby.

## **Contact us**

**Delivery Suite  
Ward 4 South  
Wellington Hospital**

**Phone: (04) 8060 850 (Extension 80850)**