



Membrane Sweeping

What is membrane sweeping?

Membrane sweeping is used to help your body go into labor. It is sometimes called stripping membranes. The membranes, also called the bag of waters or amniotic sac, hold the amniotic fluid (water) that is around your baby. The bag of waters protects your baby and gives your baby room to move around. When the bag of waters is gently lifted away from the sides of the uterus (the part of your body where your baby grows), hormones are released. These hormones help soften the cervix (the opening to the uterus) and prepare the uterus to have contractions (muscles getting tight).

Why would I have membrane sweeping?

Membrane sweeping can shorten the time before you go into labor. Studies have found that labor often starts a few days sooner in women who have membrane sweeping compared with women who did not have membrane sweeping. Membrane sweeping lowers the chance that you will need to have your labor induced. Membrane sweeping can lower your chance of staying pregnant too long after your due date. Once you are 1 or 2 weeks past your due date, your baby has grown and needs more food than they can get from your body. At that time, it is safer for your baby to be born than for you to stay pregnant.

How is membrane sweeping done?

To sweep the membranes, your health care provider will put a gloved finger into your vagina and through your cervix. They will move their gloved finger to gently lift the bag of waters off the sides of the uterus and cervix. Membrane sweeping is easily done during a prenatal visit.

What should I expect after membrane sweeping?

Membrane sweeping does not usually start labor right away. During membrane sweeping, you may feel some cramping like you get during your period. You may feel mild cramps or contractions (muscles of your uterus getting tight) for up to 24 hours afterward. You may also have slight spotting (a small amount of blood on your underwear) for a day or two. This blood can be reddish, pink, or brown and may be mixed with yellowish or clear mucus. Spotting and mild cramping after membrane sweeping are normal.

Are there risks to having membrane sweeping?

There is no risk of harm to you or your baby after membrane sweeping. Some people worry that membrane sweeping may cause the bag of waters to break. Studies have found this is not true. You and your health care provider can still choose membrane sweeping if you have a positive GBS culture.

How often can I have membrane sweeping done to try to start labor?

The first membrane sweeping can be done when you are close to your due date, and it is safe to go into labor. Your provider may offer membrane sweeping at each prenatal visit once you are at your due date. Membrane sweeping does not start labor right away. It is best to wait at least 2 to 3 days after having it done before you have it done again.

What are reasons I might want to have membrane sweeping?

You may want membrane sweeping if:

- You are close to or past your due date.
- It is important for you or your baby's health that you start labor soon.



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 an active genital herpes lesion (sore).
- Have been told that you need to have your baby right away and that it would be safest to have your labor induced very soon.
- Do not want to do anything to help start your labor.

For More Information

Babycenter

<https://www.babycenter.com/pregnancy/labor-and-delivery/membrane-sweep>

Evidence Based Birth: The Evidence on Membrane Sweeping

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

Medical News Today

<https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/322701#risks-and-safety>

Sandwell and West Birmingham NHS Trust

<https://www.swbh.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/ML3896-Membrane-Sweep-page-order.pdf>

Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level: 6.1

Approved August 2021. This handout replaces “Membrane Sweeping” published in Volume 63, Number 5, September/October 2018.

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