

# When your waters break early

## What does it mean when your waters break early?

During pregnancy your growing baby is in your womb (uterus) in a sac of water (amniotic fluid) surrounded by two membranes. Sometimes the sac of water breaks before labour starts. This is called ‘waters breaking’ or ‘membranes rupturing’ and it normally happens just before or during labour. If your waters break before 37 weeks, it is called Preterm Pre-labour Rupture of Membranes (PPROM). About two out of 100 pregnant women will experience PPROM.

## How do we check if your waters have broken?

It is not always easy for you to know for sure if your waters have broken. Some women feel a big gush of fluid come out and some might just feel a trickle or dampness.

When you come to hospital, your doctor or midwife may ask your permission to:

* use a speculum to look inside your vagina. They will check to see if the leaking fluid is coming from your cervix. They will also look at the cervix to see if it is changing in preparation for labour.
* do a swab test to confirm if the fluid is amniotic fluid
* do an ultrasound scan to check the amount of fluid around baby, as well as baby’s growth and wellbeing
* do vaginal swabs to check for infection.

## What does this mean for you and your baby?

If your waters have broken early, what happens next will depend on whether you or your baby have signs of an infection, how many weeks pregnant you are, and your individual medical and pregnancy/birthing history.

Your doctor or midwife will recommend that you stay in hospital for at least 48 hours so that you and your unborn baby can be closely monitored for signs of infection. You will be prescribed antibiotics to reduce the risk of infection for you and baby. Your doctor or midwife will tell you more about what PPROM might mean for you and your baby and how they are going to monitor you. They may ask if you would like to go on a tour of the Special Care Nursery or Neonatal Intensive Care Unit. They may also ask if you would like to see someone from social work, spiritual or pastoral care.

Once your waters have broken, it is possible that you might:

* go in to premature labour
* go home after 48 hours and wait for labour to start
* be transferred to a bigger hospital, with facilities to care for premature babies
* be given tablets to slow or stop contractions (nifedipine)
* be given injections to mature your baby’s lungs (corticosteroids)
* need a drip to protect your baby’s brain development (magnesium sulfate)
* or your baby might develop signs of an infection
* be induced to start labour
* need to deliver your baby straight away.

### What if your baby is born prematurely?

Babies born before 37 weeks can have an increased risk of health problems. They may need nursery care to help with breathing, maintaining their temperature and blood sugar, establishing feeding and preventing infection. The earlier your baby is born, the more help they are likely to need.

### What if you go home after 72 hours?

Some women are able to go home after 72 hours if they do not have any signs of labour or infection. If you do go home, your doctor or midwife will tell you the signs of infection to look out for. They will recommend that you:

* wash your hands carefully **before** and **after** going to the toilet or changing your pad
* check your temperature every four hours (it should not be higher than 37.0 degrees)
* check the colour of the fluid (you should wear a pad – **do not use tampons**)
* avoid vaginal intercourse
* do not go swimming or have baths.

### Telephone the hospital on this number if

* **your baby moves less than they have been**
* **you feel unwell or your temperature goes above 37.0 degrees**
* **you feel like you can’t catch your breath, or your breathing is fast**
* **the colour of the fluid coming out of your vagina is green, yellow or red**
* **your tummy or back become sore or you start to have contractions (pains)**
* **you are worried or have questions.**

### Questions and notes

It can be normal to have lots of questions and to feel anxious about what is happening. You should feel free to talk through any questions or concerns with your doctor or midwife.

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