



Outpatient Cervical Ripening with Foley Bulb Catheter

What's an induction of labor?

Labor induction is the use of a mechanical balloon or prostaglandin medications to start (induce) a woman's labor.

Why are patients scheduled for an induction of labor?

Labor is induced to stimulate contractions of the uterus in an effort to have a vaginal birth. There are medical reasons we may recommend an induction related to the health of the mother or fetus. Examples include hypertension or diabetes in pregnancy. Many women may request an elective induction, which can be scheduled anytime after a woman reaches 39 weeks of pregnancy. There are many reasons women may make this request, including maternal comfort, scheduling issues with family, childcare, work, or other situations like living far away from the hospital.

What is cervical ripening?

Ripening the cervix is a process that helps the cervix soften and thin out in preparation for labor. Cervical ripening is often the longest part of a patient's induction process. Medications or mechanical devices may be used to soften the cervix so it will stretch (dilate) for labor.

Outpatient cervical ripening with a Foley bulb catheter:

For patients that want to decrease the time spent in the hospital for an induction, many will be eligible to begin cervical ripening outside of the hospital. We currently offer cervical ripening using a Foley bulb catheter placed in the office.

Once your induction is scheduled, interested patients will also be scheduled for a 30-minute office appointment 1-3 business days before the date of your hospital induction. Your appointment will include an ultrasound to confirm your baby is head down and that the amniotic fluid is normal.

We will review the procedure and have you sign a consent form. Then, during the vaginal exam, a Foley bulb catheter is passed through your cervix into the lowest part of your uterus. The balloon is filled with saline. The end of the catheter will then be taped to your leg.

After placing the Foley bulb catheter, you will be monitored with a fetal non-stress test for 20 minutes. If you and your baby continue to do well, you will then go home. When the hospital calls you to come in for your induction, they will already know that you had a Foley balloon placed in the office ahead of time.

If the Foley bulb falls out at any time before the hospital calls you, you can discard it in your regular trash. If 24 hours have passed since your Foley bulb was placed, we recommend you remove the Foley bulb (simple to do, instructions will be given to you at time of placement). Then you will continue to wait to be called in for your induction.

What to expect when you go home:

Having a Foley bulb catheter in place will not interfere with your using the bathroom or cause significant pain.

You may feel pelvic pressure and/or more noticeable contractions. Spotting and increased discharge are also common while a Foley bulb is in place.

If the catheter does fall out on its own, it usually means you are now at least 3 cm dilated.



El Camino Women's Medical Group

Obstetrics, Gynecology, Infertility & Minimally Invasive Surgery

