**Induction of labour using Propess**

It is sometimes necessary to start labour artificially, this is known as induction of labour. We may recommend inducing your labour if you are overdue, or if we have any concerns about your wellbeing or that of your baby.

Every year in the UK, between one in four and one in five women have their labour induced (NICE 2008, local statistics 2015). The method of induction depends on the reason you are being induced. This factsheet provides you with information about induction using Propess.

Propess is only recommended if you are:
- expecting your first baby
- between 10 and 12 days overdue
- fit and healthy with an uncomplicated pregnancy

If you are being induced due to your social circumstances or because you are experiencing pelvic girdle pain, induction with Propess may be recommended after discussion with your consultant obstetrician.

**Why labour is induced if you are overdue**

Labour is a natural process which usually starts between 37 and 42 weeks of pregnancy. After 42 weeks of pregnancy the risk of your baby developing health problems increases. There is also a small but higher risk of stillbirth. It is not possible to reliably predict which babies are at increased risk so induction of labour is recommended to all women between 41 and 42 weeks of pregnancy (NICE 2008), usually when you are 12 days over your due date.

Induction will be planned in advance so you will be able to discuss the advantages and disadvantages with your midwife. If you decide not to have your labour induced at 42 weeks, your midwife will discuss additional assessment of your baby’s wellbeing with you.

**Inducing labour using Propess**

Propess is a pessary similar in shape to a small tampon, which is inserted into your vagina. The pessary contains the drug dinoprostone, which has the same effect as the naturally occurring hormone prostaglandin (which is involved in starting labour).

Dinoprostone stimulates the muscles in your cervix, causing your cervix to open (dilate). This in turn stimulates the muscles in your womb (uterus) causing them to start contracting and labour to begin.

When you are about 41 weeks pregnant (seven days overdue) your midwife will arrange an appointment for you to attend the induction of labour suite (on D level at Princess Anne Hospital) for when you are 12 days overdue.
You will be given a specific time to attend, which will usually be in the afternoon. Depending upon the workload within the hospital, your induction may be delayed or brought forward. Decisions to alter your appointment will only be made to protect the wellbeing of you and your baby. **It is very important that you bring your antenatal notes to your appointment.**

The midwife looking after you will talk you through and ensure that you understand the process of induction and give you the opportunity to ask any questions. Before the induction process begins, it’s important for your midwife to:

- Confirm that:
  - you are expecting your first baby
  - you are between 10 and 12 days overdue
  - your pregnancy has remained uncomplicated
  - your baby is in a head down position
- Assess your current wellbeing by checking your temperature, pulse and blood pressure. You will also be asked to provide a urine sample.
- Examine your abdomen with their hands (known as palpation) to assess your baby’s position and find out if you’re experiencing any contractions.
- Listen to your baby’s heartbeat continuously for approximately 20 to 30 minutes using an electronic fetal monitor. The exact length of time may vary.

During the induction process, your midwife will perform an internal (vaginal) examination to assess the length and dilatation of your cervix and insert the Propess pessary, if appropriate.

Following insertion of the Propess pessary, your midwife will continue to assess your baby’s heartbeat for approximately another hour, using an electronic fetal monitor. During this time you will be asked to remain in a reclining position for approximately 20 minutes to allow the pessary to soften. This allows the process of hormone release to begin.

If you and your baby are both well following the procedure, you will be advised to go home and wait for the onset of labour. You will be given an appointment to return to the induction of labour suite 24 hours after the Propess pessary was inserted.

**At home following Propess insertion**

We recommend you read the factsheet ‘What to expect in early labour’. This gives you information about what to expect and how to look after yourself during the early stages of labour. It also gives contact details for the Labour Line, a dedicated telephone support service that you can contact for advice or support.

A midwife from Labour Line will phone you between six and eight hours after you have had the pessary inserted to check that all is well.

**Concerns**

Please phone the Labour Line (0300 123 9001) immediately if you experience any of the following:

- your baby’s movements are reduced
- you experience very frequent contractions (more than three or four times in ten minutes) or constant abdominal pain
- you have any bleeding from your vagina
- you feel unwell or feverish
- you experience nausea, vomiting or diarrhoea
- your waters have broken and/or have an offensive smell or are brown or green in colour
- the Propess pessary falls out or drops into your lower vagina

**You may need to be seen by a midwife or obstetrician straight away**
Labour within 24 hours of Propess insertion

Your labour may start gradually with pains that feel similar to period pain or backache. You should also experience contractions as the muscles in your uterus (womb) tighten and then relax. As labour progresses the contractions tend to become longer, stronger and more frequent.

If you’re in established labour (3 to 4cms dilated) and having regular contractions within 24 hours of receiving the Propess pessary, you will be encouraged to labour and have your baby in Broadlands Birth Centre. In the birth centre environment there is a focus on normal birth, and you will be encouraged to remain upright and mobile and to consider the use of the birthing pool. Being in these surroundings may help you to feel more relaxed and also more in control, reducing the likelihood of you needing to use pain relief for labour.

If labour doesn’t begin after 24 hours

You will be given an appointment to return to the induction of labour suite 24 hours after your Propess pessary. Your midwife will assess your wellbeing and that of your baby, and perform an internal examination of your cervix. If induction with Propess has not been successful and labour has not begun your midwife will discuss your options with you. These may include:

- **Breaking your waters** – making a small break in the membranes and releasing the fluid surrounding your baby (during an internal examination) allows your baby’s head to press more firmly on your cervix and aims to increase the strength of your contractions
- **Use of the hormone drip** – the drip contains a drug called Syntocinon (similar to the natural hormone oxytocin) which is given via a thin plastic tube (a cannula) in your hand to encourage contractions
- **resting and then repeating the induction**
- **planning a caesarean section** (birth of your baby through an incision (cut) to your lower abdomen)

A review by an obstetrician (specialist doctor) may also be arranged. If you would like any further information about these options or have any questions, please discuss them with your midwife or obstetrician who will be happy to answer any queries you may have.

Maternity services
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Coxford Road
Southampton
SO16 5YA

If you need a translation of this document, an interpreter or a version in large print, Braille or on audio tape, please call 023 8120 4688 for help.