

Understanding Waters Breaking During Pregnancy: What to Expect and What to Do



Highlights

Waters breaking refers to the rupture of the baby's protective amniotic sac, and this usually occurs during late pregnancy or labor.

For most people, the waters break during labor, rather than before it starts.

If your waters break before 37 weeks, contact your midwife or doctor immediately and go to the hospital.

If the water is green or brown, go straight to the hospital.

Most people will give birth within 48 hours of their waters breaking.

In This Article

What does 'waters breaking' mean?

How will it feel and look when my waters break?

When can I expect my waters to break?

What should I do if my waters break in public?

What happens if my waters break early in pregnancy?

How soon after my waters break will I give birth?

How will midwives or doctors confirm that my waters have broken?

What are the warning signs that something is wrong?

When should I contact my midwife or doctor?

What does 'waters breaking' mean?

Waters breaking, or the rupture of membranes, happens when the amniotic sac that surrounds the baby breaks. This results in the release of amniotic fluid, which may leak out of the vagina.

It is a natural part of late pregnancy or early labor, signaling that the baby is preparing for birth.

How will it feel and look when my waters break?

When your waters break, the fluid may come out as a sudden gush or a slow trickle. It can feel similar to involuntarily urinating, but usually, it's painless, and some people may not feel anything at all.

Characteristics of amniotic fluid:

It doesn't have the smell of urine.

It may have a slightly sweet smell.

It's usually clear, but it can appear yellowish or pinkish.

If the fluid appears green or brown, it may mean that the baby has passed meconium, indicating potential distress. In such cases, it's important to seek immediate medical attention.

When can I expect my waters to break?

Each pregnancy is unique, so predicting when waters will break is difficult. In most cases, waters break during the first stage of labor, but sometimes it can happen before labor begins.

What should I do if my waters break in public?

If your waters break while you're out in public, try to remain calm. It's not an emergency, as it's not common for waters to break before labor starts.

What to do:

Use a maternity pad if available.

Contact your healthcare provider for guidance on when to go to the hospital or birthing center.

What happens if my waters break early in pregnancy?

If your waters break before 37 weeks of pregnancy, this increases the risk of early labor. It's crucial to get medical attention immediately.

In the hospital, healthcare providers may:

Review your medical history

Perform an examination and monitor the baby

Conduct tests, including blood, urine, and a vaginal swab

Use ultrasound to monitor both the parent and baby

Since the amniotic sac provides a protective barrier, its rupture increases the risk of infection. Your healthcare team might recommend antibiotics or other treatments, possibly including a hospital stay for monitoring.

How soon after my waters break will I give birth?

The timing of labor can vary, but generally:

About 7 in 10 people go into labor within 24 hours of waters breaking.

Almost 9 in 10 people give birth within 48 hours.

If waters break after 37 weeks and labor doesn't start within 24 hours, medical professionals might consider inducing labor due to the increased risk of infection.

How will midwives or doctors confirm that my waters have broken?

If there is uncertainty, a healthcare provider may:

Perform a vaginal examination using a speculum.

Conduct a test to detect amniotic fluid proteins in vaginal fluid, confirming

the rupture of membranes.

What are the warning signs that something is wrong?

If the amniotic fluid is green or brown, immediate medical attention is necessary, as it may signal fetal distress. When the baby is in distress, they might pass meconium (first stool) into the amniotic fluid, which causes the fluid to turn green or brown.

When should I contact my midwife or doctor?

You should contact a healthcare provider urgently if:

Pain relief is needed.

The amniotic fluid has a foul smell.

There is vaginal bleeding.

A fever of 37.4°C (99.3°F) or higher develops.

You experience flu-like symptoms or feel generally unwell.

You notice a significant change in the baby's movements.

You experience regular, painful contractions or persistent abdominal pain.

Tools And Assistance

Here are some helpful tools and support options to consider:

Prenatal Classes: Attend prenatal classes to learn about labor, including what to expect if your waters break, and how to prepare for the birth.

Healthcare Provider: It's important to maintain regular appointments with your healthcare provider to discuss your birth plan and ensure you're prepared for the unexpected, like waters breaking before labor begins.

Maternity Pad: Have a maternity pad available in case your waters break in public. This will help you manage the leaking amniotic fluid comfortably.

Emergency Contact Numbers: Keep the contact numbers of your midwife, doctor, and hospital easily accessible in case of any concerns or if your waters break unexpectedly.

Birth Plan: Talk to your healthcare provider about your birth preferences.

Having a birth plan in place, including what to do if your waters break early, can help ease your mind.

Support from a Partner: Having a birth partner or someone with you during labor can be extremely helpful. They can assist you in managing any discomfort, helping with mobility, and providing emotional support.