

What is “membrane sweeping”?

Membrane sweeping, also known as “stripping membranes” or “rimming the cervix”, is an *optional* procedure that involves inserting the doctor/midwife’s gloved finger into the cervix (the opening of the uterus/womb) and rotating the finger to try and stretch the membranes that enclose your baby. This can trigger a release of a hormone that may initiate your natural process of labour preparation. It is usually offered at 38 weeks of pregnancy and can be repeated at subsequent visits. It can only be performed if the cervix is slightly dilated and in a position that can be easily reached.

Why is membrane sweeping done?

When performed every week starting at 38 weeks, some studies have shown that membrane sweeps decrease the duration of the pregnancy and decreases the need for inducing labour. Other studies have found no clear benefit. How your pregnancy and your body respond to this procedure is not predictable.

What will I feel during the sweep?

You may feel mild or moderate discomfort during the exam and procedure. It takes about 30 seconds to perform. Sometimes uterine cramping (somewhat like menstrual cramps) can persist for longer.

Can anything go wrong?

No harmful effects have been demonstrated with membrane sweeping. Although rare, it is possible that we could break your water while doing a membrane sweeps. This would lead to your caregiver planning an induction of labour usually with oxytocin into an intravenous (IV) line. Also, some patients can have bright red bleeding during or after the procedure; this is because the cervix has a lot of blood flow and can bleed when it is touched. This is usually nothing to be worried about but should be assessed by the on-call doctor or midwife.

What can I expect after I leave?

It is common to have mild spotting or pink/red discharge intermittently for the day following membrane sweeping. It is also common to have uterine cramping or contractions after the procedure. These generally do not need to be assessed at the hospital. Please come to see us at the hospital (unit 100) if:

- You develop contractions that are painful, come on every 3 minutes, and continue for more than 1 hour as this might indicate labour.
- You experience constant abdominal pain.
- Your water breaks or you are continuously leaking fluid.
- You experience heavy bleeding similar to a period or begin to pass blood clots.

Please let us know if you have additional questions or concerns.