

Ruptured Membranes: When the Bag of Water Breaks



What is the amniotic sac?

The amniotic sac—also called the membranes or bag of waters—is a sac that surrounds your baby in your uterus (womb) during pregnancy. The sac holds the amniotic fluid (water) that protects your baby and gives your baby room to move around. The amniotic sac also protects your baby from infections. The walls of the amniotic sac are made by 2 membranes called the chorion and amnion. The 2 membranes are stuck together into one sac. When your bag of waters breaks, it is called ruptured membranes.

When do the membranes rupture?

The membranes will usually rupture (break) on their own either just before you go into labor or sometime during your labor. In about 1 in every 10 women, the membranes rupture several hours before labor starts. Although rare, the bag of waters can break days before labor starts. When the bag of waters breaks before labor starts, this is called premature rupture of membranes (PROM). Your health care provider may break your bag of waters for you while you are in labor.

How will I know when my membranes rupture?

Sometimes women feel or even hear a small pop when their bag of waters breaks. After your membranes rupture, you will continue to leak amniotic fluid until the baby is born. The amniotic fluid is warm like your body temperature, and it does not have any smell. It is usually clear like water. You may feel a large gush of fluid coming from your vagina that makes your underwear and pants wet. Or you may have just a small trickle of water that makes your underwear feel damp. The leaking fluid is usually a small amount, but you will probably need to wear a pad or keep changing your underwear once it happens.

If you are not sure if your bag of waters has broken, put a pad in your underwear and wait for a short time. If the pad gets wet, call your health care provider. Your provider will collect a swab of fluid from inside of your vagina to test to see if your membranes are ruptured or not.

What happens if my membranes rupture before I am in labor?

When your bag of waters breaks, you will need to call your health care provider. You may be asked to come to the office or hospital to be checked. The longer your bag of waters is broken before birth, the more chance there is that your baby could get an infection.

If your bag of waters breaks within 3 weeks of your due date, your choices depend on how you and your baby are doing. Your health care provider may recommend waiting for a short time to let your labor start on its own or inducing your labor right away. You will discuss the pros and cons of each of these options with your health care provider and make a plan.

If your bag of waters breaks more than 3 weeks before your due date, your health care provider may want to have you stay in the hospital to stop labor so you do not have a premature baby. You may also be given antibiotics to help protect your baby against infection.



What should I do if my membranes rupture or I think they may have ruptured?

If you think your membranes have ruptured, call your health care provider and then follow their instructions.

It will be important to tell your provider:

- What time the bag of waters broke
- What color the fluid is, such as clear, green, yellow, or brown
- If the water has a bad smell
- Your due date
- If you are having regular contractions
- If you have had a very quick labor in the past
- If your baby is not in the head-down position
- If you have been told the baby is very high in your pelvis
- If you had a cesarean birth in the past and plan to have another cesarean birth with this pregnancy
- If you tested positive for group B strep (GBS) during this pregnancy
- If you don't know if you have group B strep or not

What should I do if my membranes rupture and I am not having my labor induced right away?

Labor contractions can start any time after your membranes rupture. Most women go into labor within 12 hours after the membranes rupture. About 1 in 10 women do not go into labor on their own after a day or so. Together, you and your provider will make a decision about how long you will wait if labor does not start.

While you are waiting for labor to start:

- Put on a clean pad
- Do not put anything in your vagina
- Drink plenty of liquids—a cup of water or juice each hour you are awake
- If you are tired, get some rest as you will be in labor soon
- If you are not tired, take a walk or do something that you enjoy that will help you relax
- Take a shower or bath
- If there is any change in your baby's movements, call your health care provider right away
- Check your temperature with a thermometer every 4 hours—call your health care provider right away if your temperature goes above 99.6° F

For More Information

Mayo Clinic: Water Breaking

<http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/labor-and-delivery/in-depth/water-breaking/art-20044142?pg=1>

US National Library of Medicine: Premature Rupture of Membranes

<https://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/patientinstructions/000512.htm>

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