

labour induction acupuncture in Melbourne

By Dr. Sheena Vaughan

Our therapists are often asked to provide acupuncture for labour induction in Melbourne. This is often from women who desire their labour to begin naturally.

You may be one of these women, who is worried they may be overdue to give birth, or that you would like to avoid medical induction. You might have come to us through a recommendation from your GP or a friend who had a good experience with acupuncture and labour.

Although acupuncture is by no means guaranteed to start labour it can, however, get you prepared for labour, relaxing your body and mind, relieving pain and reducing the stress associated with giving birth.

Acupuncture can be very effective in helping a woman to relax prior to the natural onset of labour. It is important to understand here that acupuncture by no means mimics the medical labour induction that you might receive at a hospital when your mainstream medical health professionals are working to start the labour. This type of medical induction can be riskier and may involve many more interventions.

Further, acupuncture does not have the same effect on you as medical induction using the drug synthetic syntocinon. Very rarely will labour begin during an acupuncture session, and if it does then you will be in safe and capable hands during the process with your Chinese medicine doctor.

When should I begin acupuncture for pre labour induction preparation?

Often women will contact Qi Medicine just a week or two before birth, as a knee-jerk reaction to fear of “going over” their due date. Although we can certainly work with women this close to birth, we certainly prefer a more gentle lead up to the event if possible.



If you are considering acupuncture and labour induction, we recommend starting at around 34 weeks, which gives you plenty of time to get familiar with acupuncture, familiar with us and to relish the relaxing sessions before the sleepless nights!

This also gives us plenty of time to help support you, and for you to discuss your fears and worries around birth with us. The more fear we can alleviate, the more likely you will be to produce more oxytocin and less adrenalin during the birth process, which can assist with a healthy delivery.

When a mother is physically and emotionally ready, acupuncture will assist in further relaxing the muscles and sinews in the belly and pelvis, and boost endorphins and natural ‘feel good’ hormones. When a mother goes into labour with a more relaxed body, calmer mind, and an endorphin boost, it may improve overall outcomes and lead to fewer medical interventions during birth.

What does medical labour induction involve?

Sometimes, a medically induced labour is necessary for the wellbeing of mums and bubs- this we understand. However, once a labour induction begins, there are inherent medical risks that could be an issue and therefore constant foetal monitoring is needed.

If you are attached to a monitoring machine, this could restrict your movement during active labour, possibly making the process more difficult than it would otherwise be.



In a medical induction, synthetic oxytocin is pumped into your bloodstream via an intravenous drip, which will need to stay attached for the duration of labour. This synthetic stimulation can promote a quick start and rapid intensifying of labour, as opposed to natural labour.

Unfortunately for mum, she will not benefit from the same amount of natural painkillers, oxytocin, and endorphins that rise gradually in natural labour- to help her through the process.

Whilst a woman with a medically induced labour can eventually fall into a good rhythm, it is the primary stages of labour that could be the most difficult, and where fear, pain, and anxiety could be potentially in the driver's seat.

When a woman is overcome by fear, pain, anxiety, and fatigue, this can lead to what is known in the industry as a 'cascade of interventions', which is what commonly follows a medically induced labour. These interventions include an epidural, caesarean, assisted births (forceps/vontuse) and episiotomy, all of which can put added stress on mother and baby in the birthing process.

Of course, when a medical induction is needed for medical reasons, it can be the best way forward. It is just always worth asking the question of your specialist "*Is this absolutely necessary?*"

How can I get my birth started naturally?

There are many things you can do to help the natural onset of labour. Our top three recommendations are:

1. **Ensure you are giving birth in a place you feel comfortable, safe, and in control.**

This may be at home, in a birthing suite, or a hospital you have visited and approved of prior, and you have your own warm clothes, music, and essential oils on hand. If you are unsure, speak to a birth attendant, midwife or a sympathetic obstetrician about your concerns. Remember this is all about you being comfortable, not them telling you what you should do.



2. **Get a good birth partner and support**

team.

During the birth process, you rely heavily on your support team, even to help you drink and move. Investing in hiring a doula (birth attendant) alongside your birth partner can be an excellent investment. The doula will not only know what to do to help support you, but they will help your partner, and keep you all calm and feeling in control. Plus, a doula is a wealth of information and know-how, that can help reduce any fears and anxieties you may have about birth.

3. **Have a birth plan**

A plan that your support partner and a doula can follow through the process is essential. When you are in the throws of labour don't expect to be able to speak properly, let alone communicate your desires. You need your support team to be fully aware of your

wishes, and for them to communicate these to the health professionals helping to deliver your baby.

When should I get acupuncture when pregnant?

To begin the relaxation and preparation process early, we recommend beginning acupuncture and/or massage at around the 34-36 week mark. Treatments will be aimed at:

- Relaxing the physical body and helping to alleviate stress and anxieties
- Reducing mental stress and worry
- Discussing your birth plan and preparation with a health professional
- Gently encouraging the body to be 'ready' for the birth process and reducing fear



The subtle yet powerful influence that acupuncture has on the system leading up to labour is enormous. at the very least, it can reduce mental anxieties and stress, helping you to embrace the process of birth more fully and openly.

Most of the doctors of Chinese medicine at Qi Medicine have a very good understanding of what you are about to enter into with childbirth, and what your body needs. We are able to support you on a weekly basis leading up to birth, with an understanding of the changes and fluctuations that will be taking place.

Additional tips to help your body go into labour naturally!

If left to its own devices, the body will always go into labour naturally. There is a magnificent internal 'clock' that will know exactly when it is time!

Tip 1: Let baby lead you

Trust that your body will know when it is time- there is a complex interplay of hormones and processes that occur before birth, and the body is very wise. Sometimes bubs need to 'cook' a little longer- let it if you can. Meditate, rest, enjoy this time before many sleepless nights.

Tip 2: Make love

Yes, it is possible and no it won't hurt anyone! the hormones released during intercourse can sometimes help baby along- so go for it!

Tip 3: Nipple stimulation

Along much the same lines as intercourse, the body will release a cascade of hormones that may help signal to bubs that you are ready.

Tip 4: Walking

Walking up stairs, hills (or anywhere) really will help to get your pelvis moving. The trick with walking is to not overdo it, and to keep a good balance between rest and exercise. It will do you no good if you go into labour, but you are exhausted from too much walking! Gentle, rhythmic dancing and bouncing on a fit ball may also help.

Tip 5: Raspberry leaf tea

It is recommended you take a strong cup of raspberry leaf tea, every two hours or so. raspberry leaf tea is thought to help bring on labour by stimulating and toning the smooth muscle of the uterus, and so may help stimulate Braxton Hicks contractions (the body's 'practice' contractions.)

Tip 6: Acupuncture

Acupuncture can help relax the body, reduce stress and tension and can boost feel-good hormones and natural pain killers. All of these factors are important when going into labour. Being relaxed and mentally prepared can signal the body that you are ready to meet bubs!

Tip 7: Labour induction massage

Massage, much like acupuncture, can help relax soothe and calm the body and mind. Labour induction massage can also help to boost those loved up, feel-good oxytocin hormones, which are essential in bringing on natural labour.

If you needed any more reasons to get a message, know that you really will benefit from resting and rejuvenating your tired aching muscles prior to birth. Labour will often be a bit of a physical marathon- you will want to be in the best shape possible, so prep like an athlete and get massages.

Tip 8: Spicy, chilli foods to induce labour

The reasoning behind consuming hot and spicy foods to induce labour, is that they irritate the gut lining, and thus can stimulate a bowel evacuation. This is also thought to help encourage labour. If you don't normally eat a lot of spice then don't go overboard, remember that bubs will only come when they are ready, and not a moment sooner.

Tip 9: Stretch and sweep to induce labour

A stretch and sweep can only be done by an obstetrician or midwife, and is much like an uncomfortable internal examination, or a pap smear. Your health professional will manually 'stretch' the membranes of the cervix open, and 'sweep' the membranes of the birthing sac away from the cervix.

A stretch and sweep is often done as the last resort, only when the baby's head is fully down and engaged, and the cervix is 'ripe' (soft and ready to yield).

Our acupuncture team are ready to help you with your labour.

We hope you have found some of the above advice useful, and that you feel more empowered and informed moving through your pregnancy and birth journey. The team of acupuncturists and massage therapists at Qi Medicine are ready to help you in any way we can!

References:

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