

Leaflet for women who may be in 'threatened preterm labour'

You are reading this leaflet because the doctors and midwives caring for you think that you may be in possible preterm labour (often called 'threatened preterm labour').

We understand that this may be a stressful time for you and your family, and it is important to remember that most women in your position (around 70%) do not deliver their baby early, and end up having their baby near their due date.

What does 'threatened preterm labour' mean?

If you are in 'threatened preterm labour' it means that you are under 37 weeks' gestation and having particular symptoms (this could include period-like pains, abdominal pain or back pain). Because of these symptoms, the doctors and midwives want to determine whether it is likely you will have your baby early.

How can the doctors and midwives decide if I am going to have my baby early?

The doctors and midwives can assess you to help decide whether it is likely that you are going to have your baby early. This assessment involves asking you to describe the symptoms you may have been having, your medical history and performing some tests.

Some of the tests that the doctors and midwives may perform include:

Speculum examination

This is an examination where the doctor or midwife can look at your cervix (the neck of the womb). They do this by inserting an instrument called a speculum into your vagina. The speculum helps the doctor or midwife to see if your cervix is opening, if your waters have broken and/or perform some swab tests. A speculum examination does not harm you or the baby, but may be a little uncomfortable.

Quantitative Fetal fibronectin (qfFN) test

Fetal Fibronectin is a protein which is produced during pregnancy. It works as a 'glue' between the amniotic sac (where your baby is in its 'bag of waters') and the uterus (your womb).

As Fetal Fibronectin is the 'glue' around your uterus, it cannot normally be found in the vagina until near term (your due date). If it is found in your vagina earlier it could mean you are in threatened preterm labour. When undertaking a speculum examination, doctors and midwives can take a swab in your vagina to see if Fetal Fibronectin can be found there.

We normally get the result back within 15 minutes. The quantitative Fetal Fibronectin result can range from 0 to over 500 ng/mL. The lower the result is, the less likely you are to be in threatened preterm labour.

Rupture of membrane (ROM) test

Doctors or midwives can also undertake a rupture of membrane test to see if your waters have broken. Sometimes this is not necessary as we can confirm your waters have broken from you explaining your history, looking at your sanitary pad or seeing fluid when we do your speculum examination.

The rupture of membrane test is a swab test taken from your vagina. This can be done at the same time as your speculum examination, or without a speculum.

We can get the result within 5 minutes. This result can be either positive (which means it is likely your waters have broken), or negative.

Cervical length scan

Doctors or midwives can undertake a vaginal ultrasound scan to see how long your cervix (the neck of the womb) is. The scan probe is inserted into your vagina.

We can measure the length of the cervix at the same time as the scan. The shorter the length of the cervix, the more likely you are to be in threatened preterm labour. As we are doing the scan we can show and explain to you what we are seeing on the screen.

QUIPP App

This is a mobile phone app which can accurately predict how likely you are to go into preterm labour. The app is based on research from over 1,000 women, can be used in singleton and twin pregnancies, and has been validated (which means we know the results it gives are accurate).

To use the app, the doctor or midwife inputs your medical history and the results from some of the tests explained above (your Fetal Fibronectin results and/or cervical length measurement). The QUIPP app can then give a personalised risk of delivery within the next week (for example, a 5% chance of having your baby within the next week which would also mean a 95% chance of *not* having your baby within the next week).

The doctor or midwife caring for you can show you your personalised results on the app and explain to you what your result means. If your chance of delivering within the next week is 5% or more, the doctors and midwives may discuss admitting you to hospital. If your chance of delivering within the next week is less than 5% then the doctors and midwives may talk about you going home.

You can download the QUIPP app for free (search QUIPP in android or App store, or go to www.quipp.org), however remember you will need to input one of the above test results that the doctor has done to get a final result.

What will happen next?

Depending on the results of the tests above, your medical history, and how many weeks pregnant you are, the doctors may discuss different options. These options could include:

- Going home and continuing with your normal antenatal care
- Going home and having a specialist follow up appointment (for example in a preterm birth clinic)
- Staying at the hospital for a few hours to 'see what happens'
- Being admitted to the hospital

Whatever is decided will be a personalised plan for you, decided after a detailed conversation between you and your doctor and/or midwife.

If you have any questions please ask the midwife and doctor caring for you. The below may also help:

1. **Tommy's** (together, for every baby)
www.tommys.org
2. Tommy's PregnancyLine: 0800 0147 800
3. **Bliss** (for babies born premature or sick)
www.bliss.org.uk
4. Support email: hello@bliss.org.uk

NHS Pregnancy and baby

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/pregnancy-and-baby/>