

## Q: Can eating a curry bring on labour?

A: No, although curry might help if it makes you go to the toilet.

**Our expert:** Dr Gino Pecoraro

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If you're feeling huge and bloated and desperate for your nine-month odyssey to end, you might be tempted to try some of the folk remedies that are said to bring on labour.

From driving down a bumpy road, to castor oil, to... eating a really spicy curry. But could a vindaloo really do the trick?

"Curry itself doesn't have any magical powers to bring on labour," says obstetrician Dr Gino Pecoraro, who jokingly admits his own wife went into labour after a lamb korma.

However, if eating curry "makes you have a loose bowel motion, that might have an effect"; although there is no evidence to suggest korma is better than vindaloo, tikka masala or any other curry.

It's known that irritation to the bowel can help to start labour, although exactly why is a mystery, Pecoraro says.

As well, emptying the bowel can help bring the baby's head further down onto the cervix, which can itself help kick things along. And most of us would find curry a much more palatable option than Nanna's favourite – castor oil.

So if you're someone whose gut is sensitive to chilli – the curry ingredient most likely to trigger irritation – by all means give it a go. But the amount needed to send you rushing to the loo varies between individuals.

No matter how hot that curry is though, resist the temptation to wash it down with a cold beer, as alcohol can actually delay labour.

## **Does anything really work?**

As for all the other methods touted as labour inducing, Pecoraro says there isn't a lot of evidence one way or the other.

Sexual intercourse might get things going as semen contains prostaglandins, the same hormone-like substances doctors use to help induce labour. When expectant fathers express trepidation at the prospect, Pecoraro suggests it might just get the ball rolling.

Although prostaglandins might help bring on labour in late pregnancy, there's no need to avoid sex in earlier months in fear of a premature birth. It's only in late pregnancy that sensitivity to prostaglandins increases to the point where sex might make a difference.

Stimulating the nipples is said to be useful too as it promotes production of oxytocin, the so-called "feel-good hormone" that is also used to induce labour.

If you do want to try this unproven technique, be gentle as you'll need those nipples to be in good shape for a hungry baby.

Rather than rubbing or tweaking, Pecoraro recommends putting a warm, damp tea towel into a plastic bag and then placing it inside your bra for 10 minutes at a time.

## **Patience a virtue**

But Pecoraro's, main advice to pregnant women is to practise patience, a virtue the father of four says will stand them in good stead as parents.

But, for those who find patience just too hard to achieve, what about that drive down a bumpy road?

"Oh yes, I've heard that one," Pecoraro says. "I suppose the jiggling could help bring the baby's head down onto the cervix.

"And if the bumpy road is on the way to a curry..."

*Dr Gino Pecoraro is a Brisbane obstetrician and the honorary secretary of the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists. He was interviewed by Jane McCredie.*