

# DUE DATE MYTH

Meegan Stephens  
Doula // Naturopath // Herbalist  
honora.com.au // 0424032990



Walking through this expansive rite of passage is HUGE!

Moving from woman to mother (whether for the first time or subsequently) is deeply transformative. Through labour and birth we often meet our shadows and are challenged by deep parts of ourselves and our existing narratives. Most of the time, these narratives aren't even our own thoughts and do not apply to our own values and morals. Societal narratives about "being overdue" or "being forced to induce" or "spontaneous labour" are overpowering and often all that we hear in the last few weeks of pregnancy. As well as everyone else's story and advice: "When I was pregnant...." "Oh, you can't go over 40+ because...." "When are you booked for...."

When actually, if you can quiet the noise and remove these outside stories, narratives and unwanted pressures you will be able to connect in and trust YOUR OWN body and baby easily. All a woman needs to birth her baby is a safe, secure and supported environment. This doesn't sound like too much - however with too much external noise and pressure she will begin to feel things like doubt, fear and tension: which is completely counter-intuitive to the birthing environment she needs.

First and foremost, we must understand that each woman, each baby and each circumstance is unique. Full stop. There are already so many moving parts to pregnancy and birth and it is unrealistic and naive to have expectations around a specific due date.

Understanding the myth behind due dates is crucial for expectant women because it helps set realistic expectations, reduces anxiety, and empowers them to make informed decisions about their pregnancy and birth. The concept of a "due date" is often misunderstood, and this misunderstanding can lead to unnecessary interventions, such as early inductions or caesareans, that may not be necessary or beneficial.

It's important to remember here that we, as women, don't birth with our brains, but we birth with our bodies. Dropping into that deep trust that we instinctively know HOW to birth and really trusting the process to unfold on its own timeline. Having a doula and/or midwife through this process to continue to hold space for this transformation, I think, is imperative!

*Here's why understanding due dates is important:*

## 1. Due Dates Are an Estimate, not a Deadline:

- The due date (usually set at 40 weeks from the first day of the last menstrual period) is not an exact science. It is a general estimate of when a baby may arrive, but only about 5% of babies are born on their exact due

date. In fact, only about 50% of babies are born within a week of the due date, and many babies arrive earlier or later than expected.

- The window of "full term" is considered to be between 37 and 42 weeks of pregnancy. So, a baby born in this window is within a 'normal' range; don't forget your baby is growing perfectly for them and is ready to enter the world at their own time. Gift them this trust!
- Dates '9 months' is not exactly equal to 40 weeks' gestation anyways. To lean into the traditional tracking on a mother's gestation, women used to count moons and this historical evidence has shown us that women are more likely to witness 10 full moons before their baby is born.

## 2. Misunderstanding Can Lead to Unnecessary Interventions:

- When women (or healthcare providers) focus too much on the due date, there may be pressure for medical interventions like induction or caesarean sections, even when the baby and mother are doing well otherwise. Inductions before 39 weeks can carry risks such as preterm labour complications, respiratory issues for the baby, postpartum depression and a higher likelihood of requiring a caesarean section.
- The internal and external expectation of having a date on a baby's arrival also increases stress, anxiety and pressure on the mother which can have negative effects on the mothers and baby's health and wellbeing after birth.
- Knowing that due dates are estimates can help women advocate for themselves and avoid rushing the process unnecessarily.
- There is a lot of evidence to show that spontaneous labour has better outcomes for mother and baby; not only during labour and birth but also in the post-partum period such as mental health and breastfeeding

## 3. Helps Reduce Anxiety and Stress:

- Expectant mothers often become anxious as their due date approaches and pass, especially if they don't go into labour on that date. Understanding that it's normal for the baby to come a little earlier or later can help reduce unnecessary stress and give women peace of mind.
- It helps women embrace the natural variability and vulnerability in birth and gives them space to relax and deeply surrender and trust their bodies and their baby's journey earthside.
- Allows for trust and surrender to begin while still in the pregnancy phase. Trust and surrender are both vital during birth, so to learn these skills while pregnant is very helpful.
- Find someone a professional you vibe to help guide you through your vulnerabilities and your expectations. During labour and birth, a woman is never so vulnerable and being prepared for the shadows that might come up in this space is very helpful. Clearing these, or even being emotionally aware of these shadows, during pregnancy allows you to lean further in with confidence during your birth experience.

## *Resources to Help Women Navigate Due Dates and Avoid Unnecessary Inductions*

### 1. Books and Guides:

- "Ina May's Guide to Childbirth" by Ina May Gaskin – This book provides insight into natural birth processes and how trusting your body and baby can lead to a healthier, more positive birth experience.
- "The Birth Partner" by Penny Simkin – This guide is especially helpful for partners but also explains birth physiology and how to cope through different stages of labour.

- "Expecting Better" by Emily Oster – This book provides data-driven advice about pregnancy decisions, including the timing of inductions.
- "The Down to Earth Birth book"- Jenny Smythe - This book provides practical and real life physiology and scenarios about natural birth and surrendering to the process.

## 2. Birth Planning and Advocacy:

- Women can take childbirth classes (either online or in-person) to understand the process of labour and birth. Many doulas and midwives offer courses that help with understanding the physiological signs of labour and the role of due dates.
- Hiring a doula is a great opportunity for emotional support and information during pregnancy and labour. Doulas are trained to help women advocate for themselves in a hospital or home birth setting.
- Understanding birth preferences and creating a birth plan that prioritises the mother's and baby's health can guide decisions and reduce pressure for early inductions.

## *Coping Through the Last Weeks of Pregnancy*

The final weeks of pregnancy can be challenging, especially as the due date approaches. Here are some ways women can cope and prepare for labor in the final weeks:

### 1. Practice Relaxation and Self-Care:

- Prenatal yoga or stretching exercises can relieve tension and encourage optimal foetal positioning. As well as reducing stress, tension and mental load.
- Meditation and breathwork can help calm the mind and reduce anxiety. Apps like Headspace or Calm offer relaxation techniques.
- A relaxing bath, massages, or using essential oils may also help soothe the body and mind.
- Hypnobirthing practises to prepare the mind and spirit for patience, trust and surrender both before, during and after labour and birth.
- Fear Release of any external narratives that might be creeping in to create doubt in the mothers mind.
- Connection with partner - to promote natural hormones such as oxytocin that helps trust, security and safely for birth.
- Emotional support and clearing! I spoke of this in "reducing stress and tension above", re-read this section if you need to go over it again.

### 2. Stay Active:

- Gentle movement, such as walking, swimming, or light stretching, can help encourage labour to start naturally.
- Pelvic tilts (or the "cat-cow" stretch) to relieve pressure on the lower back and help with positioning for labour.
- Avoiding too much rest or being sedentary in the final weeks helps with circulation and can encourage the baby to move into an ideal birth position.

### 3. Listen to Your Body:

- Women should tune into their body's signals and rest when they feel fatigued. Overexertion can lead to stress, but so can inactivity. It's about balance.
- If you're feeling pressure to induce labour or feeling frustrated about the waiting game, it's important to remind yourself that labour will start when both you and your baby are ready. This is easy to say and not always easy to do. Patience is one of motherhoods greatest lessons – so learning to master this skill is like a trial run waiting for labour to begin.

### 4. Use Comfort Measures:

- Acupressure or acupuncture can be helpful for reducing discomfort and possibly encouraging labour to begin, but always seek a licensed practitioner.
- Chiropractic care is another option that some women find useful to help align the body and encourage labour.

It's worth exploring these options, especially if you're past expectant dates and becomes anxious..

### 5. Prepare Mentally and Emotionally:

- Journaling about your pregnancy experience or writing down your thoughts and feelings can be a therapeutic outlet.
- Support networks: Having a trusted support team in place - whether it's a partner, family member, doula, or friends- can be key in those final days. Knowing that you have people to rely on can ease anxiety.

### 6. Trust the Process:

- One of the most powerful things a woman can do in the final days of pregnancy is trust her body and her baby. Labour will begin when the time is right. Almost always, simply being patient and surrendering to the natural rhythm of pregnancy is the best approach.
- Let go of any strict timelines and allow the body to take the lead.
- This can sound easy - however deep trust in the birth process usually waivers in the last few weeks of pregnancy as the mother starts to become uncomfortable, emotional, exhausted and nervous for her upcoming birth.
- Being reminded she is SAFE, SECURE and can trust her body are messages she needs to hear - frequently so she feels supported and relaxed to wait for her baby.

Knowledge is empowering, and women who are well-informed about their options and the natural course of pregnancy can approach their birth experience with confidence and less fear as they prepare to walk through the deep portal that is: becoming a mother. Coping in the final weeks involves taking care of both body and mind, embracing relaxation techniques, and trusting that the baby will arrive in its own time.

By equipping themselves with the right resources and support, women can help ensure that their final weeks of pregnancy are as positive and empowering as possible and they are ready: emotionally, physically, mentally and spiritually to bring their baby earthside.

