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## What I Ate to Go into Labor

By Sarika Chawla | August 19, 2016 | 10:15am

Photos: Sarika Chawla

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When I was 38 weeks pregnant, my obstetrician informed me if I didn't go into spontaneous labor by my due date, she would schedule me for a repeat C-section. Having spent my entire pregnancy rallying my doctors, spouse, family and friends to support my goal of delivering vaginally, I was now facing D-day (C-day?) and it was up to me to get things moving.

Talk to any full-term pregnant woman and she's likely already Googled every method to get the baby out. (Side note: never tell her to "enjoy this time" and "rest while she can." Just don't.)

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Pelvic pain and sciatica meant that many methods for natural labor induction were off the table for me, namely long walks and don't-even-talk-to-me-about-sex.

Acupuncture and acupressure were out of my budget, and I wasn't about to start experimenting with Chinese herbs or inserting evening primrose oil into my nether regions.

That left me with one option: food. There

are countless anecdotes surrounding certain foods for their abilities to induce labor and I set out to try as many as I could.

My first stop was Caioti Pizza Café in Studio City, California, founded by the late Ed LaDou. The chef, known in culinary circles as the “father of gourmet pizza,” opened his restaurant nearly 30 years ago, but I wasn’t there for the pizza. For decades, The Salad, as it’s officially called on the menu, has been purported to induce spontaneous labor.

Thanks to word-of-mouth success stories, pregnant women waddle into the small café almost daily to dine on the romaine and watercress tossed with walnuts, (pasteurized) Gorgonzola cheese and balsamic vinaigrette, in the hopes of going into labor. Over the years, owner Carrie LaDou has engaged with pregnant customers to learn their personal stories: “We always ask if this is their first “salad baby,” and of repeat customers, seven or eight out of 10 say that it worked for them before.”

Of course, she points out, what constitutes “working” varies among women, since labor has kicked in anywhere from a few hours to several days later — indicating it may have happened with or without the salad.

LaDou says her physician once suggested the enzymes in the dressing’s balsamic vinegar — sourced from a top-secret region — can cause muscle contractions. “I think it’s a combination of the dressing with the salad itself,” she says. “It was a happy accident so I’m not going to mess with it.”

I tried the salad — with extra dressing — a week before my due date, taking only tentative bites because I wasn’t quite ready for the desired effects to kick in. It’s delicious, for sure, and along with friendly wait staff that seemed genuinely curious about my pregnancy and piles of guest books filled with other women’s stories, it made for a welcoming atmosphere.

Still, I had no signs of labor in the coming days. I briefly debated stocking up on fresh pineapple, thought to ripen the cervix. But the theory is that one would have to eat multiple pineapples to reap the benefits of the effective enzyme, bromelain.

Therefore it was time for the next option: spicy food. I went all out on my mission: five-alarm buffalo chicken wings, cheese-and-jalapeno-stuffed bread with a peppery dipping sauce, chips and extra-hot salsa. Eating spicy food is probably the most common folklore regarding natural labor induction, but again, the exact properties remain largely unknown.

“Spicy foods can make the gut work faster, so some think it can cause the uterus to

contract as well,” explains Dr. Jonathan Schaffir, associate professor of the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology at The Ohio State University College of Medicine. [In his report](#), half of 201 women surveyed used unprescribed methods to encourage labor, including spicy food, laxatives and herbs.

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He draws a potential connection between foods that have a laxative effect and labor: “Many women notice gastric upset prior to going into labor because the prostaglandins that are involved in uterine labor can also cause intestinal contractions.”

Based on that logic, it explains why black licorice is also recommended to induce labor, and why a [Jordanian study](#) showed that women who ate six dates a day in the weeks leading up to birth had higher rates of spontaneous labor and increased cervical dilation upon hospital admission.

I skipped out on the licorice but dutifully ate plump, sweet Medjool dates every day and can attest that they are, in fact, rich with fiber.

Still, even though women may report anecdotal success stories, Dr. Schaffir believes most methods merely stem from old wives’ tales without any scientific evidence backing it up. “There’s always bound to be someone who is successful because they’re about to go into labor naturally anyway,” he says. “In general, the safest thing is to let nature take its course.”

Two days before my due date, after a second round of cheesy jalapeno bread, I lost my plug but had no other signs of labor. A quick trip to the hospital confirmed that it still wasn’t my time yet.

I ate my daily allotment of dates, and the next night, ordered in an eggplant Parmesan sub from a local Italian restaurant. I had only faint hopes for this one since the lore stems from a very specific dish at Scalini’s Italian Restaurant, located 2,000 miles away near Atlanta. The restaurant, which opened in 1980, claims to have had more than 300 pregnant women give birth within 48

hours of dining on the famous eggplant Parmesan.

If I had any energy, I could have [recreated their recipe at home](#), in the hopes of having my “eggplant baby.” Instead, I decided to add extra oregano and basil to my own order, which some theorize is the trigger in Scalini’s dish.

That night, my water broke. On my exact due date, I was admitted to the hospital where it was confirmed that my amniotic sac had ruptured, but my cervix was as uncooperative as it could be. My beautiful daughter was born via C-section by mid-afternoon. And it was a delicious journey getting there.

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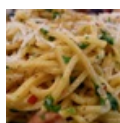
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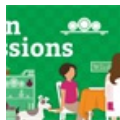
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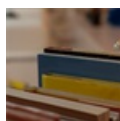
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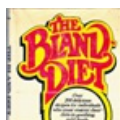
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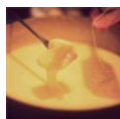
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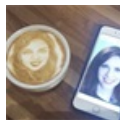
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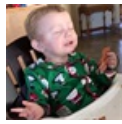
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