

Can you induce labor?

Toward the end of pregnancy, it's hard not to feel over it at times. So do often-recommended self-induction methods work? "We don't recommend self-induction, but the absolute earliest someone could safely try would be 39 weeks," says OB-GYN Michelle LaFomara, M.D., a clinical instructor at Harvard Medical School. Her verdicts:

The method: castor oil

The reality This bowel stimulator can cause uterine contractions and an embarrassing case of diarrhea, but not cervical change.

The method: nipple stimulation

The reality This can prompt the release of oxytocin, the hormone that causes contractions, but you'd need a whole lot of "stimulating" to actually induce labor.

The method: intercourse

The reality Semen contains prostaglandin, a cervical softener, but not enough to stimulate labor.

The method: spicy foods

The reality Again, no labor, just a potential case of heartburn.

The method: massage or acupressure

The reality Great ways to relax but won't induce labor.

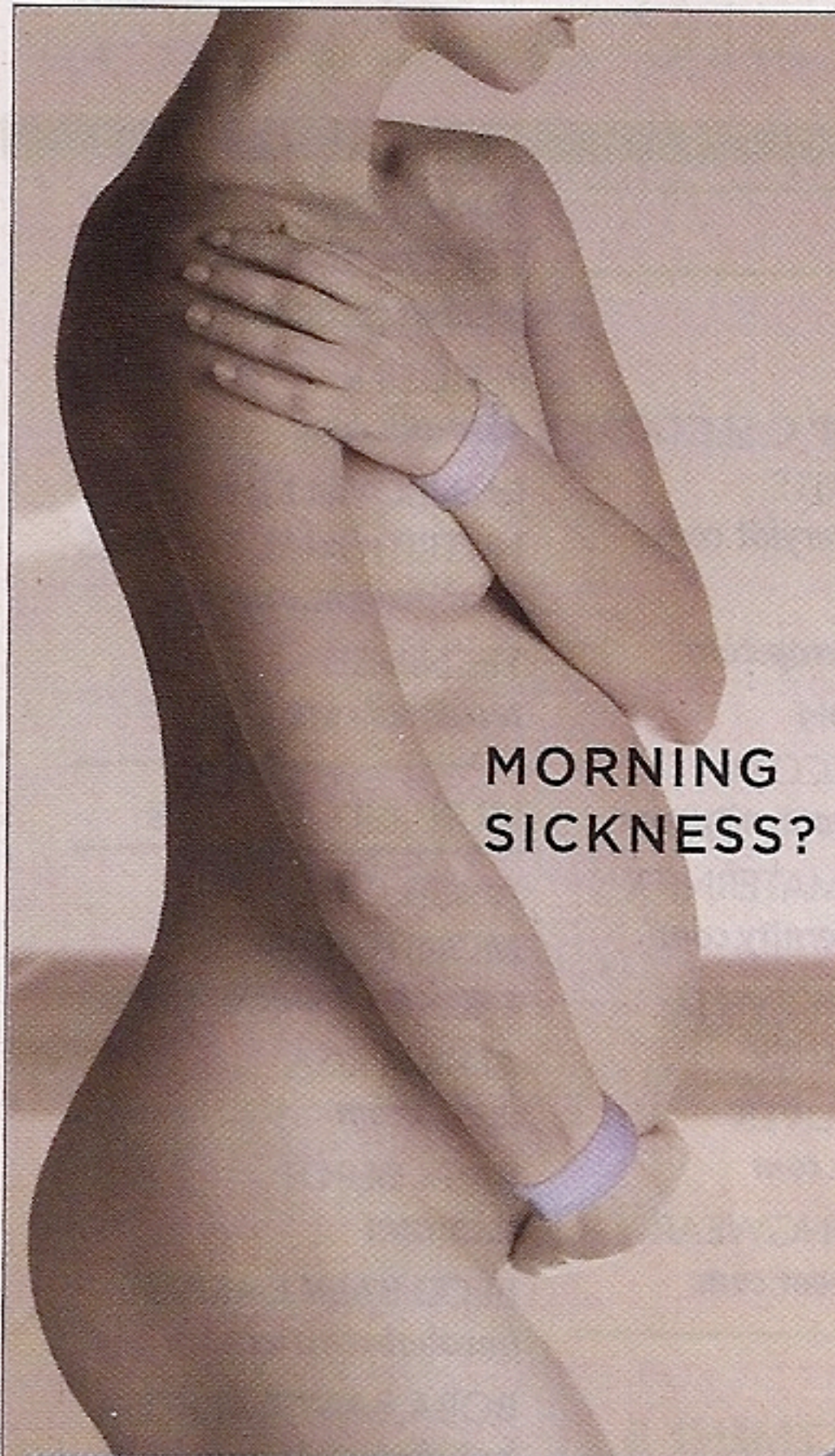
The method: herbs

The reality Some can stimulate contractions; but herbs can be dangerous, so only a midwife experienced with herbal therapies or a licensed herbalist should give them. — CORINNE GARCIA

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