

What to Ask ... When Visiting a Birth Center

Choosing where you will give birth is a big decision. We encourage you to visit potential birth settings, to talk with staff and to print and bring this list of questions—and a notebook to write down answers and thoughts. Revisiting this tool throughout pregnancy as you learn more can help ensure your maternity care stays in step with your priorities (keep in mind that you can change care arrangements during pregnancy if you choose). Visit ChildbirthConnection.org/HealthyPregnancy for more information about many of the topics mentioned below.

Accreditation, Licensing and Practice

- **Is this center licensed by the state?**
- **Is this center accredited by the Commission for the Accreditation of Birth Centers?**
- **Are the birth center midwives certified? Are they licensed to practice in this state?**
- **What are the credentials of the midwives who practice here?**
Did You Know? The three nationally recognized midwifery credentials in the United States are CNM (certified nurse-midwife), CM (certified midwife) and CPM (certified professional midwife).
- **How many years of birth center and other experience do they have?**
- **Would I be able to meet and get to know all the midwives who may attend my labor and birth?**
- **What are the core values, priorities and goals of the midwives who practice here?**
- **What doctor(s) provide backup for situations beyond your scope of practice? How would I meet them?**

Services

- Does the birth center offer classes on:
 - Childbirth education?
 - Newborn care?
 - Breastfeeding?
 - Postpartum adjustment?

If not, can you offer referrals to community resources on these topics?

Prenatal Care

- In your practice, how long are prenatal visits and whom would I see?
- What schedule of prenatal visits do you recommend, and what happens during those visits?
- What might lead you to view me as “high-risk” and how would that affect my care?
- What problems or complications in pregnancy would mean that a doctor would become my primary maternity care provider? If that happens, what arrangements would you make? Would you still have a role in my care?

Companions During Labor and Birth

- Do you have any policies that limit the number of people who may be with me during labor and birth? Can the baby’s siblings be present? Is there an age restriction?
- Would my partner/spouse be able to stay with me throughout my stay at the birth center? What accommodations are available?
- Do the midwives here provide continuous support during labor?
- Do you have experience with trained labor support (doulas) during labor and birth? Do you encourage the use of doula care?

Did You Know? Doula care offers a lot of benefits and has no known risks.

Care Around the Time of Birth

- **How do you feel about elective induction (when there is no health problem)?**

Did You Know? Negative impacts of induced labor on breastfeeding, mother-baby attachment and maternal mental health are plausible and haven't been well studied.

- **How do you monitor the well-being of the baby during labor?**

Did You Know? Dopplers and fetoscopes are safe and effective options and enable you to move around during labor. Unlike continuous fetal monitoring, they do not increase your likelihood of having a cesarean section. Typically continuous electronic fetal monitoring is not used in birth centers.

- **What are your usual policies and practices about:**

IVs (intravenous lines) during labor?

Did You Know? The best available research has found that IVs are not appropriate as a routine practice. The end of an IV can be inserted and taped to your arm just in case IV fluids need to be attached later.

Being active and moving about in labor?

Did You Know? The best available research supports your freedom to be up and about during labor, which reduces your likelihood of having a cesarean birth.

Eating and drinking in labor?

Did You Know? The best available research supports drinking when thirsty and, if you want, eating lightly.

Positions for birth?

Did You Know? The best available research supports avoiding lying on your back when you are pushing your baby out and encourages women to choose other positions, according to their preferences.

- **What is your usual approach if labor is progressing slowly?**

Did You Know? Synthetic oxytocin ("Pitocin") is not used in birth centers to speed up labor. Skillful midwives know many drug-free ways to promote labor progress. Many less invasive things can be done before deciding on a cesarean.

- **What percentage of the time do women giving birth here get an episiotomy (a cut to enlarge the opening of the vagina just before birth)?**

Did You Know? The best available research finds no benefit and some risks to the routine or liberal use of episiotomy.

Coping with Labor Pain

- **How would you recommend that I prepare for managing pain during labor and birth?**

Did You Know? There are a lot of ways to relieve and cope with labor pain, with varying risks and benefits, so it's important to know your options and learn about their pros and cons in advance.

- **What drug-free measures for pain relief are available at this birth center?**

Did You Know? Drug-free methods and techniques (such as tubs, showers and birth balls) can help women cope with labor and have limited or no side effects. Because of risks, some pain medications are not available outside of a hospital.

- **What if I decide I want an epidural?**

Did You Know? Epidurals can provide good pain relief but often change the course of labor in other ways that can have risks and downsides. Epidurals are not available at out-of-hospital birth centers because of the side effects and other interventions that usually go hand-in-hand with an epidural. In this case, you would need to go to the hospital.

- **Are other pain medications an option?**

Did You Know? Nitrous oxide can provide helpful pain relief with fewer unintended side effects than epidurals or opioids (narcotics).

Complications and/or Transfer

- **If a transfer becomes necessary at any point, what hospital would I use? How can I arrange to take a hospital tour?**
- **What problems or complications in pregnancy would require me to change to a different care provider and to plan to give birth in a hospital?**
- **What problems or complications in labor or after birth would require me to transfer to a hospital?**
- **Would my midwife be able to be involved with my care if I am transferred to a hospital?**
- **Under what circumstances would my baby need to be transferred to a hospital?**

- **Are you certified in neonatal resuscitation? What kind of resuscitation equipment is available at the birth center?**
- **What percentage of births at the birth center involve an emergency transfer?**
- **What emergencies could arise during and after labor and birth, and how would you handle them? What emergency supplies and equipment are available at the birth center?**
- **What percentage of the women you work with switch to hospital birth during pregnancy? During labor? After labor?**
- **What percentage of the babies you help birth are then hospitalized?**
- **What percentage of women who begin labor here end up having a cesarean?**

Postpartum and Newborn Care

- **What newborn care is routinely provided or offered if a baby is healthy?**
- **Are there any reasons my baby would need to be separated from me immediately or shortly after birth?**

Did You Know? The best available research supports no routine separation of mothers and babies after birth.

- **Will my baby and I be able to be in skin-to-skin contact after the birth?**

Did You Know? Being in skin-to-skin contact right after the birth (during and beyond the “golden hour”) has important benefits for you and your baby as you both adjust to major changes, get breastfeeding under way and start to build your relationship.

- **How will you help me get breastfeeding off to a good start?**
- **How long is the maximum stay after the birth?**

- What follow-up care and support would you provide after I go home?
- Is there an option for a home visit?

Special Health Considerations

- I have *[a particular health condition or concern]*. How would this affect my ability to work with you and give birth in the birth center? How would it affect the care you would provide and recommend?

Cost

- Do you accept *[name of my insurance plan]*? Do you have tips for me to get coverage for birth center services?

Did You Know? If you don't have health insurance, you can visit [HealthCare.gov](https://www.healthcare.gov). Because you are pregnant, you qualify for a special enrollment period and may be able to sign up for insurance now, or you may qualify for Medicaid. Also keep in mind that you should call your insurance company to make sure your preferred hospital is covered by your plan; the list of participating hospitals can change over time.

- What is your fee and what does this include?
- Are there any possible extra costs that I should know about now?
- Do you accept alternative payment arrangements?

Childbirth Connection, a program of the National Partnership for Women & Families, works to improve the quality, outcomes and value of maternity care in the United States. Learn more at www.ChildbirthConnection.org and www.NationalPartnership.org.

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