

# What is a birth plan?

A birth plan is a way for you to communicate your wishes to your healthcare team who will care for you while in labor. It tells them about the type of labor and birth you'd like to have, what you want to happen, and what you want to avoid.

A birth plan is not set in stone. It needs to be flexible and acknowledge that things may not go according to plan. Write a plan you hope to be followed but don't make your OB Providers feel their hands are tied if complications arise during your labor.

You don't have to write a birth plan, but if you do, your Provider will help you. If you're not sure about a certain procedure, or if you prefer to keep your options open, talk to your Provider and then write it down.

Your birth plan is personal to you and should reflect your wishes and preferences. You may want to add details about your medical history, but your Provider will have your medical record so will be aware of your past medical history. It's worth taking into account what's available at your local hospital when you write your plan.

# What research can I do before I start writing?

Gather as much information as you can before you start:

- Take a birth preparation class. Your OB Provider should offer you classes available at the hospital where you plan to deliver or you can also sign up for antenatal classes in your community.
- Talk to other moms who have had a hospital birth or who have had their baby at the birth center you're going to. And if you're hoping for a home birth, talk to moms and dads who have been through it themselves. That way you'll learn how easy or difficult it was for them to get the kind of care they wanted.
- Talk to your partner or the person who will be your support person. Make sure they fully understand the type of labor and birth you'd like to have. How do they see their role?

Once you've spoken to a few people and researched your choices, write your birth wishes down on a piece of paper, as they come to mind. You can clean them up later.

If you are having a planned cesarean, you can still write a birth plan. Read more about [cesarean section birth plans](#).

# What should I include in my plan?

Here are some headings for your birth plan. Use the ones that are important to you and add extra headings for anything that's missing.

If you've had a baby before and have any past experiences that may affect this labor and birth, make sure you include them in your plan.

## **Your birth partner**

Say who you want to have with you in the labor room. Do you want this person to stay with you all the time, or are there certain procedures or stages when you'd prefer them to leave the room? Would you like to talk to your birth partner in private about any interventions that are suggested? And would you like your birth partner to stay with you if you need an [assisted birth](#) or a cesarean?

## **Positions for labor and birth**

Mention which [birth positions](#) you would like to use during labor and for your baby's birth. Also say how active you would like to be. Would you like to remain upright and mobile for as long as possible? Or perhaps you'd prefer to be upright in bed with your back propped up with pillows? Or you could specify that you want to lie on your side, be kneeling on all fours or standing or squatting.

## **Pain relief**

Say what kinds of pain relief you would like to use, if any, and in what order. For example, you may prefer to try IV medications before an epidural.

You could mention breathing, relaxation, water, massage, or music as well as medical pain relief. And if there are any types of pain relief you wish to avoid using, make sure you write them down.

## **Speeding up labor**

If your labor slows down, or is proving to be very long, do you want your Provider to use interventions to speed it up such as Oxytocin? Or would you prefer to wait and see what happens naturally?

## **Other equipment**

Your hospital may have wall bars, birth balls, peanut balls, mats or beanbags for use during labor. Or you may bring equipment in from home. Make a note of the type of equipment you would like to use in your plan.

## **Monitoring your baby's heart rate**

Most patients receive continuous electronic monitoring to monitor your baby's heart rate. If your pregnancy is without any complications your Provider may allow intermittent monitoring (about every 15 minutes). If this is something you desire, write this down in your plan and discuss it with your OB Provider.

## **Assisted birth**

You might want to express a preference for having an assisted delivery using [forceps](#) or a [vacuum](#). Often having an assisted delivery is based on medical need for the safety of you and/or your baby. Or you may be happy to see what your midwife or doctor recommends when the time comes.

If you have a strong preference for someone to cut the umbilical cord, maybe your birth partner, say so. You could also mention if you would prefer [delayed cord clamping](#). Delayed clamping usually happens if you are having a physiological third stage, but may also be possible with a managed third stage.

## **Skin-to-skin contact**

You may wish for your baby to be placed directly onto your tummy straight after birth, or you may prefer for your baby to be cleaned up before he or she is handed to you.

## **Feeding your baby**

Be clear about whether you want to breastfeed or bottle feed. Also be clear about whether your breastfed baby is allowed to have any bottles of formula. If you definitely don't want him or her to have formula, say so.

# What if I have particular needs?

You may have special requirements that you want to mention in your birth plan. If you have a disability, write about the help you'll need in labor. Say whether there is any special equipment that would assist you.

If English isn't your first language and you need an interpreter, say so. Also let your healthcare team know if you need a sign language interpreter.

Include any religious requirements, such as customs you'd like to be carried out when your baby is born. Or you might require a special diet during your hospital stay. Write all of these things down. Health professionals are committed to being culturally sensitive and treating you as an individual.

## I've written my plan. What happens next?

Show your birth plan to your OB Provider before during one of your last antenatal appointments and ask him or her to go through it with you, ideally before you are 36 weeks pregnant.

Discussing your plan with your Provider will give you the chance to ask questions and find out more about what will happen when you go into labor. Also, by listening to your preferences, your Provider will get to know you better and understand what's important to you.

Though a birth plan is helpful, labor and birth are unpredictable. Your Provider may need to recommend a different course of action at any time that is not what you had originally hoped for. Rest assured the recommendation your Provider makes will always be in the best interests of you and your baby.