



CHOOSING WHERE TO HAVE YOUR BABY

Every woman has a right to a safe, satisfying birth experience. Before 1900, almost all women had their babies at home. By 1950, most women were having their babies in a hospital. Now, women can choose between hospital, birth center, or home birth. We are all different. What is important to you may not be important to your friends. In order to make your own decision, you will want to look at the benefits of each option.

What Are the Benefits of Home Birth?

If you choose a home birth, you will have regular visits with a midwife during your pregnancy either in your home or at a clinic. When your labor begins, the midwife will come to your home. You will need to prepare your home for the birth. The midwife will bring some tools and a few medications to care for you and your baby during labor. The midwife will usually stay for several hours after your baby's birth. She may even help tidy up and do some wash. Benefits of a home birth include:

- You will be in a private, comfortable, familiar place with the people you love.
- Because there is less medical technology around, it is less likely that you will have unnecessary procedures done to you.
- You and your baby are less likely to be exposed to infections that are common in hospitals.
- You will never be separated from your baby.
- There is no extra charge to use your home for your baby's birth. Home birth is usually less expensive than a birth center or a hospital birth.

What Are the Benefits of Birth Center Birth?

A birth center is a space in a building or a house set up for women to labor and give birth. Birth centers may be attached to hospitals or they may be in a location away from the hospital. A birth center is usually decorated to look more like a home, but it may also have some special furnishings like big bathtubs for water birth. Benefits of a birth center birth include:

- You will be in a comfortable place that is quieter and more private than a hospital, and you will be surrounded by people you love.
- There is less technology around, so it will be less likely you will have unnecessary procedures done to you.
- You and your baby are less likely to be exposed to infections than in a hospital.
- You will never be separated from your baby.
- You will have access to space and equipment (like birthing tubs) that you might not have in your home.

What Are the Benefits of Hospital Birth?

Hospitals offer different types of care for pregnant women. Some hospitals have separate areas for labor and postpartum care. Others have special rooms where a woman can labor, have her baby, and then stay until she goes home. Some hospitals encourage families to be present while others limit visitors. A tour of the hospital's labor and delivery area and an interview with the director of that part of the hospital will help you find out what services your hospital offers. Benefits of a hospital birth include:

- Hospitals are designed to handle emergencies and medical problems. If your labor is not normal or there is an emergency, you and your baby can immediately get the help you need. If there is a rare but very serious emergency, quick access to help could save your life or the life of your baby.
- You can have an epidural for pain relief.
- If you are struggling to keep food on your table or need help with other serious social problems, hospitals usually have social workers and other folks who can help you.

IS BIRTH CENTER OR HOME BIRTH RIGHT FOR YOU?

A birth center or home birth *may be right for you* if you are healthy; have a good support system; have access to a birth center, certified nurse-midwife, certified midwife, or certified professional midwife; and do not wish to have pain medication during your labor.

A birth center or home birth *may not be right for you* if you have a chronic illness; have had a cesarean delivery; or do not have anyone to help you at home.

A birth center or home birth *is not for you* if you:

- Have a serious illness or serious infection;
- Are in labor too early (before 37 weeks) or too late (after 42 weeks);
- Are carrying more than one baby (twins, triplets, etc.);
- Have a placenta previa (placenta blocking the opening of the uterus); or
- Are having a baby that is in a breech (sitting) or transverse (side-lying) position.

Even if a birth center or home birth is right for you, you may end up going to the hospital if:

- You become very ill during labor or are so uncomfortable that you need pain medication;
- There are signs (like changes in your baby's heartbeat) during labor that show that your baby is having a very hard time;
- Your placenta does not come out after the birth of the baby; or
- You begin to bleed heavily.

If you are thinking about a birth center or home birth, ask these questions:

“Who will be with me during labor and birth?”

“What education and experience do they have?”

“Are they licensed to practice in this state?”

“Do you have a consulting relationship with a doctor, and who is it?”

“What happens if you have to call him/her for an emergency?”

“How do you make sure everything goes smoothly if I need to go to the hospital during or after the birth?”

“What hospital would you take me or my baby to if there was an emergency?”

“How would we get to the hospital?”

For a home birth, asking these questions will also be helpful:

“How quickly will you come to my home when I am in labor?”

“What equipment will be brought to my home, and what will I have to provide?”

“How long will you stay with me after the baby is born?”

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For information on midwifery and a search tool to find a midwife in your area, visit www.mymidwife.org

For more information on birth centers and a search tool to find a birth center in your area, visit www.birthcenters.org

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