

CHOOSING WHERE TO HAVE YOUR BABY



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You can give birth at home, in a unit run by midwives or in a hospital. This chapter gives information about each of these options so that you can choose what is best for you.

SAFETY

Giving birth is generally very safe, wherever you choose to have your baby. There is not much evidence that compares how safe different places are. However, women who have their baby in a unit run by midwives or at home are less likely to need assistance, for example through the use of forceps or a ventouse.

If you choose to have your baby at home or in a unit run by midwives, you should be given information about what would happen if you need to be transferred to hospital during labour and how long this would take. You should also be aware that if something goes seriously wrong during your labour (which is rare) it could be worse for you and your baby than if you were in hospital with access to specialised care. You may be advised to give birth in hospital if you have, or develop, certain medical conditions.

MAKING AN INFORMED DECISION

It is important that you and your partner make an informed choice about where you would like to give birth.

It is your choice, and even after you have decided where you want to have your baby you can still change your mind. Your midwife will discuss the options that are available to you locally, though you are free to choose any maternity services if you are prepared to travel.



As well as getting information from your midwife, you can get information from:

- local maternity units
- your GP surgery
- the NCT, which can put you in touch with local mothers (see page 57)
- a supervisor of midwives (see page 74).

You may also want to seek the views of your friends and family.

See also Chapter 4 on antenatal care and Chapter 8 on labour and birth.

More information



www.nhs.uk/planners/pregnancycareplanner

www.birthchoiceuk.com

www.drfooster.co.uk/Guides/BirthGuide/

www.nct.org.uk/home



HOME BIRTHS

If you have a straightforward pregnancy and both you and the baby are well, you might choose to give birth at home. In Northern Ireland, approximately 1 in 300 babies are born at home.

If you give birth at home, you will be supported by a midwife, who will support you while you are in labour. If you need any help or your labour is not progressing as well as it should, your midwife will make arrangements for you to be transferred to hospital.

The advantages of giving birth at home include the following:

- You can give birth in familiar surroundings where you may feel more relaxed and able to cope.
- You don't have to interrupt your labour to go into hospital.
- You will not need to leave your other children.
- You will not have to be separated from your partner after the birth.
- You are more likely to be looked after by a midwife who you have got to know during your pregnancy.

The things you should consider include the following:

- You may need to transfer to a hospital if there are any complications.
- Epidurals are not available at home.
- Your doctor or midwife may recommend that you give birth in hospital, for example if you are expecting twins or if your baby is breech. Your midwife or doctor will explain why they think hospital is safer for you and your baby.

Planning a home birth

Ask your midwife whether or not a home birth is suitable for you and your baby or available to you. If it is, your midwife will arrange for members of the midwifery team to support and help you.

Here are some of the questions that you might want to ask:

- How long would it take if you needed to be transferred to hospital?
- Which hospital would you be transferred to?
- Would a midwife be with you all the time?
- How do you obtain a birthing pool?



MIDWIFERY UNITS OR BIRTH CENTRES

Birth centres and midwifery units are home-from-home places where you can go to have your baby. These units can be part of a general hospital maternity unit, in a smaller community hospital or completely separate.

The advantages of giving birth at a midwifery unit include the following:

- You can give birth in surroundings where you may feel more relaxed and able to cope with labour.
- You are more likely to be looked after by a midwife who you have got to know during your pregnancy.

The things you should consider include the following:

- You may need to transfer to a hospital if there are any complications.
- Epidurals are not available in a midwifery unit.
- Your doctor or midwife may recommend that it is safer for you and your baby to give birth in hospital.



Planning a birth in a midwifery unit or birth centre

Midwifery care is available at home, in a midwifery unit and in hospital. Ask your midwife if there are any midwifery units or birthing centres in your area. There may be others that you can use if you are prepared to travel.

Here are some of the questions that you might want to ask:

- How long would it take if you needed to be transferred to hospital?
- Which hospital would you be transferred to?
- Will a midwife be with you all the time?
- Can you visit the unit before you give birth?
- What facilities are available? Are there birthing pools, for example?

the choices

that are right for you



BIRTH IN HOSPITAL

Most women give birth in an HSC hospital maternity unit. If you choose to give birth in hospital, you will be looked after by a midwife but doctors will be available if you need their help. You will still have choices about the kind of care you want. Your midwife and doctors will provide information about what your hospital can offer.



The advantages of giving birth in hospital include the following:

- You have direct access to obstetricians, anaesthetists and neonatologists.
- You can access other specialist services, such as epidurals for relief of pain.
- There will be a special care baby unit if there are any problems.

The things you should consider include the following:

- You may go home directly from the labour ward or you may be moved to a postnatal ward.
- In hospital, you may be looked after by a different midwife from the one who looked after you during pregnancy.



Planning a hospital birth

Your midwife can help you decide at which hospital you want to have your baby. If there is more than one hospital in your locality you can choose which one to go to. Find out more about the care provided in each so that you can decide which will suit you best.

Here are some of the questions that you might want to ask:

- Are tours of maternity facilities for birth available before the birth?
- When can I discuss my birth plan?
- Are TENS machines available (see page 89) or do I need to hire one?
- What equipment is available – e.g. mats, a birthing chair or beanbags?
- Are there birthing pools?
- Are partners, close relatives or friends welcome in the delivery room?
- Are birthing partners ever asked to leave the room? Why?
- Can I move around in labour and find my own position for the birth?
- What services are provided for sick babies?
- Who will help me breastfeed my baby?
- Who will help me if I choose to formula feed?
- How long will I be in hospital?
- What are the visiting hours?



BIRTH PLANS

A birth plan is a record of what you would like to happen during your labour and after the birth. You don't have to create a birth plan, but if you want to, your midwife will be able to help

Discussing a birth plan with your midwife will give you the chance to ask questions and find out more about what happens when you are in labour. It also gives your midwife the chance to get to know you better and understand your feelings and priorities.

You will probably want to think about or discuss some things more fully with the baby's father and friends and relatives. And you can change your mind at any time. Your birth plan is personal to you. It will depend not only on what you want,

but also on your medical history, your own circumstances and what is available at your maternity service. What may be safe and practical for one pregnant woman may not be a good idea for another.

You may be given a special form for a birth plan, or there may be room in your notes. It's a good idea for you to keep a copy of your birth plan with you. The maternity team who care for you during labour will discuss it with you so that they know what you want. But remember, you need to be flexible if complications arise with you or the baby. The maternity team will be able to give advice on your particular circumstances. Don't hesitate to ask questions if you need to.

Read the chapters on labour and birth (page 85) and the first days with your new baby (page 120) before talking to your midwife, to see if there is anything you feel strongly about and want to include.



What is a midwife?



A midwife is a healthcare professional who is qualified to care for women during pregnancy, labour and after the baby is born. They also care for newborn babies until they are 28 days old, if necessary. Midwives provide care for all women and involve other members of the team, including doctors when necessary.

Midwives help women prepare for birth through antenatal education and provide advice about common problems. A nursing qualification is not necessary to become a midwife, although some midwives have one.

What is a supervisor of midwives?

A supervisor of midwives is an experienced midwife who has had extra training and education to assist and support midwives in providing the best quality maternity care.

Supervisors of midwives aim to make sure that you receive the best guidance and information about the right type of care for you. They are there to help and support you if you are having any problems with your care, or if you feel that your wishes and requests are not being considered.

The telephone number for your supervisor of midwives should be in your pregnancy information details (or hand-held notes), or you can call your hospital's labour ward/birthing room or your local birth centre. Discussing issues with the supervisor of midwives will not affect your care or influence how you are further supported in your pregnancy, birth and aftercare.