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## Home Birth Article



The National Childbirth Trust Who provided great help and support.



(Imogen minutes after she was born)

## Choosing to Stay at Home

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The decision to give birth to my daughter at home was one I will always be glad I made. Being in an environment in which I felt comfortable and which I felt I could control, I was able to work with my midwives to make her birth a positive and empowering experience.

Nowadays, despite it's many advantages, only 1 in 100 babies is delivered in the home. The general opinion of health professionals is that births are safer in hospital. But recent statistics actually suggest that low risk home births are safer and experience less intervention than hospital births.

Deciding where to have your baby is a very personal matter, and is a choice every woman has the right to make. Health professionals may try to persuade against home birth because by it's nature birth always carries an element of risk. But providing you are healthy and have a normal pregnancy, there isn't any reason why your delivery shouldn't be free of complication. In fact being at home may enable you to cope far better with labour than you would in the unfamiliar surroundings of a hospital.

After all, giving birth is a natural biological function and doesn't have to be a medical event. In the relaxed atmosphere of her home, a woman has freedom and autonomy, and birth can be a truly personal, family occasion. Welcoming your child into the world in your own environment can offer the best conditions for first contact and bonding. And, in the days following the birth you can be sure that baby will not have to be separated from his parents. Fully responsible for his care from the start, you can take your time to get to know your baby. If you have decided to breast feed, you can do so at your own pace, in the relaxed and private setting of your own home.

My partner and I spent a long time reading up on home birth, and discussing our fears and wishes before we felt ready to tell my G.P. of our decision. My pregnancy had been free of any complication so he had no real reason to object. However, after discussion with the other partners in the practice he decided that he would not support us in attending the birth, he could only refer us to the supervisor of Midwives at the local hospital. This left us with two options; we could find another, more sympathetic G.P. or opt for a 'Midwife only' delivery. We both felt happy with the latter arrangement.

The Midwife who had been responsible for my ante natal care came to visit us at home. She explained the procedure and we discussed our preferences for the birth. Although the emphasis at a home birth is on minimal intervention, this is dependent on the attitude and sensitivity of your midwife. I found it very helpful to make my wishes clear before and during my labour.

One of my main reasons for opting for a home delivery was that I was hoping to have a natural, active birth without the use of pain relieving drugs, and to avoid unnecessary intervention. My mother is a

homoeopath and I had asked her to attend the birth in a professional as well as personal capacity. Many homoeopaths, acupuncturists and alternative medical practitioners are happy to attend births, and you are well within your rights to request their presence, in hospital or at home.

Midwives bring gas and air to every birth, and can bring Pethidine if you request it before hand ( I chose not to). Being at home does rule out an epidural. I now feel sure that knowing neither option was open to me, helped me to maintain control during the most difficult stages of my labour. If I had been at hospital with drugs and an anaesthetist close at hand, I might have a very different story to tell. (More follows)

It is good to be aware of problems that can occur during birth, and how these could be dealt with at home. Any serious problems after the birth will mean transferring you and the baby to hospital. But your midwife is trained, and has the resources to deal with the most common complications. Even on a maternity ward you cannot always be sure that a doctor will be close at hand, and emergency procedure is the same wherever you are.

During labour, your baby's condition will be regularly monitored with a sonic aid. Should he become distressed this will quickly be detected, and you will be taken to hospital. The midwife carries oxygen and resuscitation equipment to use while waiting for the ambulance, should your baby fail to breathe; though this is much less likely to happen after a drug free labour. If it looks like you will need caesarean section this will be clear early enough to get you into hospital in time. In the rare event of post partum haemorrhage you would be given an injection of to contract your uterus, and again would quickly be admitted into hospital.

There wasn't really anything I needed to provide for the birth, except adequate heating, and a reading lamp. However I did arrange hire of a Tens machine, and spent a lot of time over the long weeks preceding my labour, making sure everything in my home was clean, comfortable, and as I wanted it to be for the big event.

When I was 37 weeks pregnant, my midwife brought a birth pack to the flat containing all the basic equipment she would need. I remember how excited I felt every time I looked at this big red box, knowing that very soon it would be in use.

Three lengthy days after my due date, I awoke at three in the morning with contractions every five to ten minutes. I woke Rob my partner and he made tea while I soaked in the bath. We phoned the hospital, and soon afterwards Irene and Sylvia, the midwives who would be present for the delivery arrived, to see how I was doing. I was only 1 cm dilated, so happy that all was well they left us; remaining in touch by phone until my labour was well in progression.

It wasn't until later the evening that I needed them. I had a very long labour; 25 hours in total. However, my overriding memory of the day is of a relaxing and intimate time of preparation. We walked in the park, enjoying the autumn sunshine, and the beautiful colours of the trees. Rob played me all my favourite music while my mother massaged my feet. I moved around whenever I felt like it and took things at my own pace. Throughout labour my contractions were pretty strong, and towards the delivery they were incredibly intense; but because I felt so relaxed and in control of what happened to me, I was able to get through them using only the Tens machine, breathing exercises and massage. I got the active natural birth I had hoped for.

Irene and Sylvia discussed everything with us, and we felt that they were welcome guests in our home when the time came to deliver my daughter. They allowed me to do things the way I felt I needed to, and even though my labour was slow, they didn't rush in to interfere. Had I been under the more rigid confines of labour ward I might have felt under more pressure to hurry up and 'produce'.

After an hour of intensive pushing while Rob supported me in a squatting position; Imogen was born in our front room. She was passed to me immediately and I held her as she became pink and stirred with the first breaths of life outside my body. She was ever so alert, and looked up at me as I put her to the breast that she was nuzzling for.

Later, Imogen and I cuddled up in bed, shattered from our experience. Sylvia and Irene cleaned up and left and Rob joined me. We both gazed at our new daughter until we fell asleep. It was wonderful to wake up the next day in my own bed, with Imogen in my arms and Rob beside me.

Our choice to stay at home was not made easy for us. In going against the norm we had to stick firmly to our convictions and be clear about what we wanted. We were rewarded with a birth experience that was deeply fulfilling and truly reflected our needs and wishes.

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