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## Talk Birth

### Celebrating Women, Transforming Birth

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### Can I really expect to have a great birth?

June 3, 2009 by [talkbirth](#)

I received a [comment via another blog](#) asking “given my limited situation, can I really expect to have a great birth today?” (homebirth, midwife, and doula were all not options for the person asking the question). I think the answer is a qualified “yes.” The question really got me thinking about ways to help yourself have a great birth, when your overall choices are limited. I came up with a long list of ideas of things that may help contribute to a great birth:

- Choose your doctor carefully—don’t wait for “the next birth” to find a compatible caregiver. Don’t dismiss uneasiness with your present care provider. As Pam England says, “ask questions before your chile is roasted.” A key point is to pick a provider whose *words and actions match* (i.e. You ask, “how often do you do episiotomies?” The response, “only when necessary”—if “necessary” actually means 90% of the time, it is time to find a different doctor!). Also, if you don’t want surgery, don’t go to a surgeon (that perhaps means finding a family physician who attends births, rather than an OB, or, an OB with a low cesarean rate).
- If there are multiple hospitals in your area, choose the one with with the lowest cesarean rate (not the one with the nicest wallpaper or nicest postpartum meal). Hospitals—even those in the same town—vary widely on their policies and the things they “allow” (i.e. amount of separation of mother and baby following birth, guidelines on [eating during labor](#), etc.)
- When you get the hospital, ask to have a nurse who likes natural birth couples. My experience is that there are some nurses like this in every hospital—she’ll want you for a patient and you’ll want her, ask who she is! If possible, ask your doctor, hospital staff, or office staff who the nurses are who like natural birth—then you’ll have names to ask for in advance.
- Put a sign at eye level on the outside of your door saying, “I would like a natural birth. Please do not offer pain medications.” (It is much easier to get on with your birth if you don’t have someone popping in to ask when you’re “ready for your epidural!” every 20 minutes.)
- Work on clear and assertive communication with your doctor and **reinforce your preferences** often—don’t just mention something once and assume s/he will remember. If you create a birth plan, have the doctor sign it and put it in your chart (then it is more like “doctor’s orders” than “wishes”). Do be aware that needing to do this indicates a certain lack of trust that may mean you are birthing in the wrong setting for you! Birth is not a time in a woman’s life when she should have to fight for anything! You deserve quality care that is based on your unique needs, your unique birthing, and your unique baby! Do not let a birth plan be a substitute for good communication.
- Cultivate a [climate of confidence](#) in your life.
- Once in labor, stay home for a long time. Do not go to the hospital too early—the more labor you work through at home, the less interference you are likely to run into. When I say “a long time,” I mean that

you've been having contractions for several hours, that they require your full attention, that you are no longer talking and laughing in between them, that you are using "coping measures" to work with them (like rocking, or swaying, or moaning, or humming), and that you feel like "it's time" to go in.

- Ask for the blanket consent forms in advance and modify/initial them as needed—this way you are truly giving "informed consent," not hurriedly signing anything and everything that is put in front of you because you are focused on birthing instead of signing.
- Have your partner read a book like *The Birth Partner*, or *Fathers at Birth*, and practice the things in the book together. I frequently remind couples in my classes that "coping skills work best when they are integrated into your daily lives, not 'dusted off' for use during labor."
- Practice prenatal yoga—I love the Lamaze "Yoga for Your Pregnancy" DVD—specifically the short, 5-minute, "birthing room yoga" segment. I teach it to all of my birth class participants.
- Use the hospital bed as a tool, not as a place to lie down (see my [How to Use a Hospital Bed without Lying Down](#) handout)
- If you feel like you "need a break" in the hospital, retreat to the bathroom. People tend to leave us alone in the bathroom and if you feel like you need some time to focus and regroup, you may find it there. Also, we know how to relax our muscles when sitting on the toilet, so spending some time there can actually help baby descend.
- Use the "broken record" technique—if asked to lie down for monitoring, say "I prefer to remain sitting" and continue to reinforce that preference without elaborating or "arguing."
- During monitoring DO NOT lie down! Sit on the edge of the bed, sit on a birth ball near the bed, sit in a rocking chair or regular chair near the bed, kneel on the bed and rotate your hip during the monitoring—you can still be monitored while in an upright position (as long as you are located very close to the bed).
- Bring a birth ball with you and use it—sit near the bed if you need to (can have an IV, be monitored, etc. while still sitting upright on the ball). Birth balls have many great uses for an active, comfortable birth!
- Learn relaxation techniques that you can use *no matter what*. I have a preference for active birth and movement based coping strategies, but relaxation and breath-based strategies cannot be taken away from you no matters what happens. The book *Birthing from Within* has lots of great breath-awareness strategies. I also have several good relaxation handouts and practice exercises that I am happy to email to people who would like them.
- Use [affirmations](#) to help cultivate a positive, joyful, welcoming attitude.
- Read [good books](#) and cultivate confidence and trust in your body, your baby, your inherent birth wisdom.
- Take a good [independent birth class](#) (not a hospital based class).
- Before birth, research and *ask questions* when things are suggested to you (an example, having an NST [non-stress test] or gestational diabetes testing). A good place to review the evidence behind common forms of care during pregnancy, labor, and birth is at [Childbirth Connection](#), where they have the full text of the book *A Guide to Effective Care in Pregnancy and Childbirth* available for free download (this contains a summary of all the research behind common forms of care during pregnancy, labor; and birth and whether the evidence supports or does not support those forms of care).
- When any type of routine intervention is suggested (or assumed) during pregnancy or labor, remember to use your "BRAIN"—ask about the Benefits, the Risks, the Alternatives, check in with your Intuition, what would happen if you did Nothing/or Now Decide.
- Along those same lines, if an intervention is aggressively promoted while in the birth room, but it is not an emergency (let's say a "long labor" and augmentation with Pitocin is suggested, you and baby are fine and you feel okay with labor proceeding as it is, knowing that use of Pitocin raises your chances of having further interventions, more painful contractions, or a cesarean), you can ask "Can you guarantee that this will not harm my baby? Can I have in writing that this intervention will not hurt my baby? Please show me the evidence behind this recommendation."
- If all your friends have to share is horror stories about how terrible birth was, *don't do what they did*.
- Look at ways in which you might be sabotaging yourself—ask yourself hard and honest questions (i.e. if your greatest fear is having a cesarean, why are you going to a doctor with a 50% cesarean rate? "Can't switch doctors, etc." are often excuses or easy ways out if you start to dig below the surface of your own beliefs. A great book to help you explore these kinds of beliefs and questions is *Mother's Intention: How Belief Shapes Birth* by Kim Wildner. You might not always want to hear the answers, but it is a good idea to ask yourself difficult questions!

- Believe you can do it and believe that you and your baby both deserve a beautiful, empowering, positive birth!

I realize that some of these strategies may seem unnecessarily “defensive” and even possibly antagonistic—I wanted to offer a “buffet” of possibilities. Take what works for you and leave the rest!

Great births are definitely possible, in any setting, and there are lots of things you can do to help make a great birth a reality.


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## 8 Responses

1. on [June 8, 2009 at 4:05 pm](#) | [Reply Fear & Birth « Talk Birth](#)


[...] is tremendously significant! As I mentioned in the post, can I really expect to have a great birth, it is important to choose your birth care giver and place of birth carefully—to ask [...]



2. on [June 17, 2009 at 12:43 pm](#) | [Reply](#)  Claudia

I have read everything here and I find everything very helpful. I am a first time mother although I am very young I look forward to giving birth I am very happy and ready to give birth. I want a natural birth, I don't plan on using any medication such as the epidural.



3. on [June 18, 2009 at 11:15 am](#) | [Reply](#)  Stephanie

Though you touched on it would I like to add to appoint an advocate for you – especially helpful if they are a person of at least some authority like spouse/partner. As with reading hospital consent forms before hand not when in the middle labor it's the same idea – sometimes dealing with the constant pressure of pushy staff is too much when you are already in the middle of labor, not to mention you should be so focused on laboring that sometimes you don't even know what is going on around you. I appointed my husband to take care of people who were pushing anything on me. Not did he stand up for what I wanted to do but caught things that would have happened without my noticing until much later. (A nurse tried to hook up pitocin at one point and I was a little disoriented by labor so I didn't even realize what was going on until my husband jumped up and stopped her.)

4. on [June 22, 2009 at 3:49 pm](#) | [Reply Trusting Your Doctor « Talk Birth](#)

[...] in your body, and trust in birth rather than exclusive trust in provider—but there is often a lot more involved in preparing for a great birth than simply trusting your care provider. Additionally, there is definitely a lot more to birth [...]

5. on [September 9, 2009 at 4:15 pm](#) | [Reply What to Expect When You Go to the Hospital for a Natural Childbirth « Talk Birth](#)

[...] For some additional ideas see my post, “Can I really expect to have a great birth?” [...]