

How to Choose Your Birth Team

You might think it's too early to start planning for the big day, but it's never too early to start thinking about what kind of birthing experience will be the ideal one for you. Every woman who's had a baby will tell you, you can't really plan your baby's birth because your schedule isn't necessarily the same as your baby's – your little one will arrive when *she's* ready to. But the more you know and can plan for, the more comfortable you will feel about your labour and the arrival of your baby. And since no one can predict what your birth will actually be like on the big day (just like a fingerprint, every birth is unique), don't be too hard on yourself if things don't go exactly as planned. The most important thing is for you and baby to be safe and healthy.

Getting the support you and baby need

Having the right people around you is key – especially during your labour and delivery. Take some time to think about who you would like to be a part of this experience and include your wishes as part of your birth plan.

Your birth team will probably include medical professionals, childbirth experts and supportive loved ones. Use this guide to help you figure out who you would like on your birth team, who you will need – and why.

Part 1:

What to consider before you choose your birth team

Location. It's probably not the first thing that comes to mind when you envision your perfect birthing experience – but location will affect many of the decisions you make when planning who will attend your birth.

Your prenatal educator is a great person to ask about the services and professionals available in your region.

Which province or territory do you live in?

If you choose to have a midwife as part of your birthing team and you live in British Columbia, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec or the Northwest Territories, your province or territory will cover the cost.

That doesn't mean if you live outside of these provinces or territories you won't be able to find a midwife. It only means your provincial healthcare plan may not cover the full cost. For example, if you live in Alberta, choosing a midwife will be an added expense of about \$2500 (2003 estimate.).

Do you live in an urban centre or a rural setting?

Urban centres have more hospitals and birthing centres to choose from. For example, if you live in or near Toronto, there will be more hospitals than if you live in Red River. On the other hand, if you live in a rural setting, it may be easier to access a nurse practitioner during your pregnancy. In rural areas, there are a greater number of nurse practitioners available to help compensate for the fewer number of hospitals. So, be sure to talk to your prenatal educator or doctor about the services available where you live.

Part 2: Building your birth team

Birth partner

You couldn't imagine experiencing pregnancy without this person. He's your husband or your partner. Your mother or your best friend. It's that special person you can count on to give you the support you need throughout your pregnancy, labour, delivery and after your baby arrives.



Prenatal Educators

Your prenatal educator is anyone who provides you with support or advice about your pregnancy (e.g., your Lamaze coach or a parenting instructor). They will answer your questions and provide you with the information and support you need. They will focus on pregnancy, birth and early parenting. Most importantly, they will be able to tell you about the hospitals and maternity services available in your region.

Birth Doula

Your doula will give you non-medical prenatal, childbirth and postpartum support. Sometimes referred to as a birth assistant, she is trained to provide emotional and physical support during your labour. Your doula may use massage, aromatherapy and positioning suggestions to help you during labour.

Midwives

Your midwife is an expert in women's healthcare – specifically prenatal care. She will help to ensure you have a healthy pregnancy and natural birth experience. She will be present during childbirth, and while she is licensed to prescribe certain drugs and order required tests during your pregnancy, she will not intervene with any medications unless necessary.

If you choose to have a doula or midwife as part of your team, be sure to ask her a few questions about her training, certification, the number of births she's attended and her philosophies on labour.

Maternal/Newborn Nurse

Your nurse is a trained medical professional and, just like doctors, specializes in certain areas of care. So expect to receive care from a variety of nurses before and after your baby is born. Throughout your pregnancy a nurse practitioner may also be available to you. She will offer you prenatal care and advice similar to a physician. Once your labour starts and you are admitted to the hospital, you will meet your *labour and delivery nurse*.

Ask her questions. Be honest about your fears and look to her for support throughout your labour – she's there to help. After your baby is born, you will meet your *nurse lactation consultant* who will provide breast-feeding help and

support to you and your baby. Finally, you will meet your *public health nurse*. She will provide you with continued follow-up care, advice and support after you leave the hospital. With everything else you'll be thinking about, you can rest easy knowing you have your very own team of experts to help support you during your first introduction to your wonderful new baby.

Family Physicians

Your family physician may provide some prenatal care. But fewer family doctors are delivering babies than in the past. After week 32 your doctor may transfer you to another family physician, obstetrician or midwife for the duration of your pregnancy and delivery.

Obstetrician-Gynaecologists

Not every obstetrician-gynaecologist (Ob-Gyn) provides prenatal care. But more Ob-Gyns are delivering Canadian babies than ever before. If your pregnancy is deemed high risk (women with diabetes, develop preeclampsia or women expecting twins or multiple births), expect an Ob-Gyn at your delivery. If you're scheduled for a caesarean, the same applies.



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