

What to Expect When You Go to the Hospital for a Natural Childbirth

By: Molly Remer, TalkBirth.me

"This list is modified from material found in the book Woman-Centered Pregnancy and Birth."

When you go to a hospital for a natural childbirth **EXPECT** some if not all these things to happen:

- Expect to have at least some separation from the person who brought you to the hospital, whether this separation is due to filling out admission paperwork, parking the car, giving a urine sample, being examined in triage, etc.
- Expect to remove all your clothing and put on a hospital gown that ties in the back.
- Expect to have staff talk over you, not to you, and to have many different people walk into your room whenever they want without your permission and without introducing themselves.
- Expect to have your cervix examined by a nurse upon admission and approximately every hour thereafter. Sometimes you may have multiple vaginal exams per hour by more than one person.
- Expect to have an IV inserted into your arm, or at minimum a saline lock (sometimes called a Hep lock).
- Expect to be denied food and drink (at best, expect clear liquids or ice).
- Expect to give a urine sample and perhaps a blood sample.
- Expect to have an ID bracelet attached to your arm.
- Expect to have to sign a consent form for birth and for application of a fetal monitor that states that your doctor will be responsible for making the decisions about your care (not you).
- Expect to have a fetal heart rate monitor attached around your belly—two round discs on straps that will often stay with you continuously until you give birth (or, at best, for 15 minutes out of each hour of your labor).
- Expect to have your water manually broken at about 4 centimeters (or at least, strongly suggested that you allow it to be broken). After this point, expect to be encouraged to have an

electrode screwed into the baby's scalp to measure the heartbeat and a tube places in your uterus to measure your contractions.

- Expect to be offered pain medications repeatedly.
- Expect to receive Pitocin at some point during your labor – "to speed things up."
- Expect to be encouraged (or even ordered) to remain in your bed through much of labor, especially pushing.
- Expect to be told you are not pushing correctly.
- Expect to either have your legs put in stirrups or held at a 90 degree angle at the hips.
- Expect to hold your baby on your chest for a few minutes, before it is taken away to be dried, warmed, and checked over.
- Expect the baby to have antibiotic eye ointment put into its eyes (without telling you first).
- Expect to have your baby suctioned repeatedly.
- Expect to be given a shot of Pitocin to make your uterus contract and deliver the placenta.
- Expect not to be shown the placenta.
- Expect your baby to be given a vitamin K injection.

What you **DESERVE**:

From: "Six Lamaze Healthy Birth Practices" (www.lamaze.org)

1. Let Labor Begin on Its Own
2. Walk, Move Around, and Change Positions Throughout Labor
3. Bring a Loved One, Friend, or Doula for Continuous Support
4. Avoid Interventions That Are Not Medically Necessary
5. Avoid Giving Birth on the Back and Follow the Body's Urges to Push
6. Keep Mother and Baby Together – It's Best for Mother, Baby, and Breastfeeding

Advance Preparation: WHAT TO TAKE and WHAT TO DO

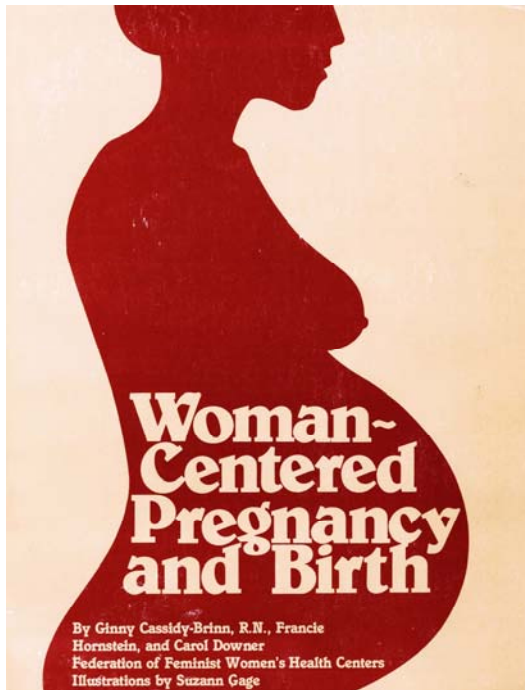
- Discuss in advance the type of nursing care you would like and request that your doctor put any modifications to the normal routines in your chart as “Doctor’s Orders” (if your doctor is unwilling to do so, seek a new medical care provider!)
- Go through the above list of “what to expect” and make a decision about how to handle each one on a case by case—you may choose to actively refuse something, you may be okay with accepting certain procedures or routines, and you can develop a coping plan for how specifically to work with any particular issue.
- Take independent childbirth classes and learn a variety of techniques and pain coping practices so that your “toolbox” for working with labor is well stocked.
- Hire a doula, or bring a knowledgeable, helpful, experienced friend with you. It can help to have a strong advocate with you (this may or may not be a role your husband or partner is willing to take on).

- “Many people, if they can find no other way to get around a dangerous or unpleasant hospital policy, unobtrusively ignore it”—a good example of this is with regard to eating and drinking during labor. Restricting birthing women to ice chips or clear liquids is not evidence-based care. Bring light foods and drinks and quietly partake as you please.

Prior to Birth:

- Labor at home until labor is very well-established.
- Another tactic is to “never ask permission to do what you want, but to go ahead and do it unless the hospital staff actively stops you.” (An example of this is of getting up and walking around during labor).
- Leave the hospital early, rather than remaining the full length of stay post-birth. This can minimize separation from baby and other routines you may wish to avoid.

Woman-Centered Birth and Pregnancy



By Ginny Cassidy-Brinn, R.N., Francie Hornstein, and Carol Downer
Federation of Feminist Women’s Health Centers
Illustrations by Suzanne Gage

AVAILABLE ONLINE for FREE

womenshealthinwomenshands.org/BirthingOurBabies

A key to understanding pregnancy from an empowered feminist perspective. Gives women the information they need to competently evaluate their options in childbirth. Contains indexes of pregnancy and childbirth resources nationwide.

Molly Remer’s “What to Expect When You Go to the Hospital for a Natural Childbirth” picks up where “Woman-Centered Pregnancy and Birth” leaves off. “...My idea for [What to Expect When You Go to the Hospital for a Natural Childbirth] didn’t come from me alone, it was sparked by reading a similar list in the 1970’s book Woman-Centered Pregnancy and Birth, co-authored by Carol Downer.”
Molly Remer, Talkbirth.me

Women’s Health in Women’s Hands is a website by Carol Downer. It features DIY Gynecology, with lots of woman-to-woman information about our reproductive and sexual anatomy, safe and effective birth control, abortion, menstruation, menopause, and menstrual extraction - told frankly from an independent woman’s point of view.

www.womenshealthinwomenshands.org