

Writing a Birth Plan



What is a birth plan?

A birth plan is a written statement of your desires and what is important to you when you are in labor and giving birth. A birth plan describes the experience you hope to have, and the ways you want support or help from those who are caring for you.

How is a birth plan used?

You will write down some things you want to happen or things you do not want to have happen. The second page of this handout lists many of the items women put in birth plans. You share the birth plan with your health care provider during a prenatal care visit and review it together. When the plan is complete, your provider may want to put a copy in your prenatal chart. You should also keep a copy to share with the providers caring for you when you are in labor.

What are the advantages and disadvantages of writing a birth plan?

Advantages:

- Allows you to share your goals and ideas about what will help you the most during labor.
- Allows you to learn about your choices before you are in labor.
- Going over a birth plan during a prenatal visit gives you the chance to discuss the usual procedures for all women in labor at the place where you will give birth before you are in labor. This allows you to be better prepared.

Disadvantages:

- If you think of the birth plan as your choices and plans instead of your hopes and goals, then you may be disappointed if the things you list in your birth plan do not happen. It is not a plan that you know for sure will take place in every way because many different things can happen during labor and birth. If your labor becomes complicated, you may need interventions, such as an IV, that you hope ahead of time not to need.

How do I know what I want in a birth plan?

Going to childbirth education classes, speaking to family or friends who have given birth in the setting where you will give birth, hiring or speaking to a doula (pregnancy and labor support person), reading pregnancy books, and searching pregnancy Web sites can help you learn what options are available to you. You should also speak to your health care provider and friends and family who have values like yours as you learn about your choices. A hospital or birth center tour can also explain the usual procedures that you can expect at your birth site.

Steps for Writing a Birth Plan

1. Learn and talk to your health care provider about the usual procedures that may affect your goals. Talk to your partner, family, or friends, but remember to also take time to listen to yourself!
2. Write a first copy that you can change before writing a final one. Go over it with your health care provider before writing a final birth plan.
3. Make several copies once you have your final birth plan written.
4. Bring a copy with you to a prenatal visit to be saved in your chart.
5. Pack copies of your birth plan if you're having your baby at a hospital or birth center.
6. Share the rest of the copies with the health care providers caring for you during labor.

How does a birth plan help me?

A birth plan will help you learn about your choices, and it helps you share your goals for your labor and birth with those who are caring for you during labor. When you work on a birth plan with your provider, you share thoughts and ideas, which will help develop trust.

What should I include in my birth plan?

Your birth plan can include a description of your ideal labor and birth, as well as things such as those listed below that you want to happen for you or your baby. You can use this table as a birth plan and check the boxes of those items that you want to have happen, or you can use the topics that are listed in this table as some suggestions to write your own plan.

Topic	Examples
Room environment	<input type="checkbox"/> Bright lighting <input type="checkbox"/> Low lighting Who do you want to come visit you during labor?.....
Support	Who will be with you during labor and birth (family, friends, doula)?.....
Eating or drinking in labor	<input type="checkbox"/> Freedom to eat light foods and drink as much as I want



Topic	Examples
Pain management : Methods that do not use medication	<input type="checkbox"/> Massage <input type="checkbox"/> Hydrotherapy (using water, such as a shower or bath, for comfort) <input type="checkbox"/> Cold and hot packs <input type="checkbox"/> Music <input type="checkbox"/> Aromatherapy (oils) <input type="checkbox"/> Freedom to move and be in any comfortable position <input type="checkbox"/> Birthing ball
Pain management: Medications	<input type="checkbox"/> Prefer to have medication offered <input type="checkbox"/> Ask that medication not be offered unless you request it <input type="checkbox"/> Short-acting pain medicine such as morphine or fentanyl <input type="checkbox"/> Nitrous oxide (laughing gas) if available <input type="checkbox"/> Epidural
Medical procedures	<input type="checkbox"/> Continuous fetal heart rate monitoring <input type="checkbox"/> Intermittent fetal heart rate monitoring <input type="checkbox"/> Continuous IV fluids <input type="checkbox"/> Saline lock only <input type="checkbox"/> Artificial rupture of membranes (provider breaks water) <input type="checkbox"/> Wait for membranes to rupture spontaneously (break on their own) <input type="checkbox"/> Use oxytocin (Pitocin) only if labor is not normal, prefer nipple stimulation and walking before using oxytocin <input type="checkbox"/> Oxytocin okay if needed
Second stage of labor	<input type="checkbox"/> Help me to push however it feels right during contractions without holding my breath <input type="checkbox"/> Help me by counting out loud when I am pushing <input type="checkbox"/> Position changes while pushing (standing, squatting, lying on side)
Third stage of labor	<input type="checkbox"/> Delay cutting the cord for at least 60 seconds after the baby is born <input type="checkbox"/> Okay to cut the cord as soon as the baby is born <input type="checkbox"/> Who will cut the umbilical cord? _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Give oxytocin (Pitocin) after birth only if bleeding too much <input type="checkbox"/> Okay to give oxytocin to prevent bleeding <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer to avoid episiotomy (cut in the vagina to help the baby get out faster) and let the skin tear naturally
Newborn care	<input type="checkbox"/> Immediate skin-to-skin contact with my baby right after the birth <input type="checkbox"/> Help me breastfeed in the first hour after birth Feeding method: breast <input type="checkbox"/> or bottle <input type="checkbox"/> Pacifier use: yes <input type="checkbox"/> or no <input type="checkbox"/>
Newborn procedures in first 4 hours	<input type="checkbox"/> All procedures to be done when mother or father are present <input type="checkbox"/> Vitamin K shot <input type="checkbox"/> No vitamin K shot <input type="checkbox"/> Antibiotic ointment to newborn's eyes <input type="checkbox"/> No antibiotic ointment to newborn's eyes <input type="checkbox"/> Bathe the baby after birth <input type="checkbox"/> Do not bathe the baby after birth
Newborn procedures during first few days	<input type="checkbox"/> All physical exams of the baby done when mother or family member present <input type="checkbox"/> Okay to examine the baby in the nursery without mother or family member present <input type="checkbox"/> Hepatitis B vaccine for the baby <input type="checkbox"/> No hepatitis B vaccine <input type="checkbox"/> Newborn hearing test <input type="checkbox"/> No newborn hearing test <input type="checkbox"/> Newborn blood screening test <input type="checkbox"/> No newborn blood screening test
Postpartum care	<input type="checkbox"/> Rooming-in with baby <input type="checkbox"/> Okay to have baby in the nursery
Preferences in case of a nonemergency cesarean birth	Who will come into operating room? _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Skin-to-skin contact with newborn in the operating room
Religious, cultural, or other beliefs	Is there anything else you want your providers to know about how you want your labor and birth to be? _____

For More Information

Childbirth Connection

<http://www.childbirthconnection.org/>

Provides evidence-based information to help you understand and plan your pregnancy, labor, birth, and the postpartum period.

Baby Center.com

<http://www.babycenter.com/calculators-birthplan>

Provides information on what to include in your birth plan and a template you can use to help create your own birth plan.

Swedish Medical Center Childbirth Preparation

<http://www.swedish.org/services/pregnancy-and-childbirth/pregnancy/trimester-checklists/how-to-write-a-birth-plan>

Provides an overview of writing a birth plan, including an online template.

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