

Birth plan: what to think about

A birth plan is a way of communicating with the midwives and doctors who care for you in labour. It tells them about the kind of labour you would like to have, what you want to happen and what you definitely want to avoid. Be flexible – the best birth plans recognize that things don't always go to plan.

Birth partner:

- Do you want your partner with you at all times?
- Are there stages when you'd prefer your partner to leave the room?
- Do you want to talk to your partner in private about interventions that may be suggested?

Positions for labour and birth:

- Do you want to stay upright and mobile for as long as possible or would you prefer to be in bed?
- Do you want to give birth lying on the bed?
- Do you want to be kneeling, standing, squatting?
- Do you want to keep your options open?

Checking your baby's heart rate:

- While your midwife is checking your baby's heart rate electronically with a hand-held Sonicaid, do you want to stay upright and mobile?
- Do you have objections to having your baby's heart rate monitored continuously?

What if you're told you need help to give birth:

- Do you want to avoid an episiotomy?
- Do you want to try other positions for giving birth first? Do you have a preference for forceps or vacuum, or are you happy to see what is recommended when the time comes?

Unexpected situations:

- What if your baby needs special care while you need stitches or to recover from a caesarean? Do you want your birth partner to stay with you or go with your baby?
- Is there someone else who can help?

Birth pool:

- Do you want to use a pool at hospital or are you hiring one to use at home?
- Do you want to use it just for pain relief or for giving birth too?
- Do you want to use it to deliver the placenta?

Pain relief:

- What sort of pain relief would you prefer?
- In which order would you like to try different medical methods? For example, gas and air before an epidural.
- Which, if any, methods do you want to avoid?

Speeding up labour:

- If your labour slows down, do you want your midwife to use interventions to speed it up again?
- Would you prefer to wait and see what happens naturally?

Third stage (delivery of the placenta):

- Do you want to have a managed third stage?
- Do you want to have a natural third stage?
- Who do you want to cut your baby's umbilical cord?

Special needs:

- Have you had a past experience that may affect your labour or birth?
- If you have a disability, what will help you?
- Do you need a special diet after the birth?
- If you have religious needs, be sure to add them.