

BRINGING UP **BABY**

A PUBLICATION OF THE CHATTANOOGA TIMES FREE PRESS
MAY 10, 2017

ADVICE, APPS & MORE

FOR PARENTS OF
NEWBORNS TO
PRESCHOOLERS

SPONSORED BY:



PHOTO BY:

Urso
URSO PHOTOGRAPHY



HOME OR HOSPITAL?

DELIVERING OPTIONS FOR EXPECTANT MOMS

BY ROSANA HUGHES

THE BIRTH OF A NEW BABY BRINGS A JOY THAT IS UNRIVALED. BUT THAT JOY IS OFTEN ACCOMPANIED BY FEAR AND ANXIETY OF THE UNKNOWN, ESPECIALLY FOR NEW MOTHERS.

Much of that anxiety can be eased by ensuring you are well-informed about the different options for childbirth and by learning about the birthing process. Choosing a health care provider and birth location, as well as creating a birth plan, are important things to consider early in your pregnancy.

Knowing who you want your health care provider to be often goes hand in hand with your birth location, as most providers are affiliated with specific birth locations and have strong preferences for one or the other.

While things won't always go as expected, having a birth plan — a simple, clear, one-page list of wishes and instructions for the birth and postpartum care — helps keep you, your supporters and health care providers on the same page.

What you include on your list will vary based on your birthing location, whether it is in the hospital, at home or in a birthing center, a specialized medical facility which offers a more homelike environment than a hospital.



DELIVERY OPTIONS: HOME OR HOSPITAL?

Hospital births

EACH HOSPITAL IS DIFFERENT. SOME WILL HAVE MORE RESTRICTIONS, SUCH AS WITHHOLDING FOOD BEFORE LABOR OR LIMITING MOVEMENT DURING LABOR, THAN OTHERS. TOURING A HOSPITAL AND LEARNING ABOUT ITS POLICIES REGARDING LABOR AND DELIVERY, AS WELL AS ROUTINE INTERVENTIONS, IS KEY TO DECIDING IF THAT IS THE PLACE FOR YOU AS WELL AS WHAT YOU SHOULD INCLUDE IN YOUR BIRTH PLAN.

Although some hospitals may have more restrictions than others, they are often an appealing choice due to the preparedness and services offered to accommodate mothers. Because every mother is different, a hospital birth plan will often need to be more specific as to what services you want or don't want to receive. It may include how you would like to stay hydrated (sips of water, IV drip, ice chips) and how you would like to manage your pain (massage, breathing exercises, medication, etc.).

Tara Ledford, who has been a registered nurse on Erlanger Baroness Hospital's mother/baby floor and Neonatal Intensive Care Unit for nine and a half years, says Erlanger's "Baby-Friendly" designation means the staff is ready to help mothers have the experience they want. Launched in 1991 by the World Health Organization and the United Nations Children's Fund, the Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative recognizes hospitals and birthing centers that offer and encourage infant feeding and mother/baby bonding.



"If they want a natural delivery, they can have that in the hospital while having the safety of our staff there ready to help if something goes wrong," Ledford says. "It's nice to have a supporting staff ready to help and a NICU there if you need it."

However, there are still some limitations in what kind of birthing experience Erlanger can offer. For example, water births are not offered, and if the mother or baby have high risk factors, continuous fetal monitoring is required.

Traci Josephsen, clinical administrator for women's services at Erlanger Health System, says some instances in which a doctor would intervene or veer from a mother's birth plan would be if the mother's or baby's life was in jeopardy.

A lot of mothers, like Johnna Tate, who has given birth to all four of her children with no complications at Erlanger Baroness Hospital, find comfort in that. Tate says she chose hospital births for the confidence and peace of mind in knowing there are physicians and nurses present who can help should something go wrong.

"For first-time moms, I think you just expect your water to break and to go into labor and everything to be smooth, but 99 percent of the time that's just not how it works," Tate says. "Everyone who is taking care of you has your best interests at heart. Not that that wouldn't be the case at home; you just don't have as much backup there. The confidence and not having to worry about any complications whatsoever were big [factors] for me."



DELIVERY OPTIONS: HOME OR HOSPITAL?

Home births

SOME MOTHERS PREFER TO GIVE BIRTH AT HOME BECAUSE IT IS A FAMILIAR ENVIRONMENT, AND HAVING A FAMILY-CENTERED BIRTH EXPERIENCE IS IMPORTANT TO THEM. A HOME BIRTH CAN BE JUST AS SAFE AS A HOSPITAL BIRTH — AS LONG AS THE MOTHER AND BABY ARE HEALTHY.

For those who opt for a home birth, a midwife can offer medical support. Debi Church, who has been a certified professional midwife for more than 30 years, says there are three things a midwife should be able to do: stop a postpartum hemorrhage, resuscitate the baby and monitor the mom and baby to make sure they stay within the parameters of medical safety.

"If you have a healthy mom and a healthy baby, that is a recipe for a good outcome," Church says. "Birth is a normal physiological process — as long as you have a healthy mom and a healthy baby, not a medical event."

Should complications arise, Church says, that is where a midwife comes in, to let the mother know when it is time to go to the hospital. Specialized training, education and supervised clinical experience are required to become a certified professional midwife. The entire process is apprentice-based, primarily in out-of-hospital births, and must include a minimum of 55 births in three categories: birth as an observer, assistant under supervision and primary under supervision.

"I don't want to over-medicalize the experience, but integrating the medical model and natural model becomes a beautiful picture," Church says. "Unfortunately, some mothers just need to have their babies in

the hospital even though they were planning to have their baby at home."

For that reason, a home birth plan should include plans for transportation to the hospital in case of emergency. It may also include what kind of fetal monitoring you would like or when to cut the umbilical cord. You may also want to plan out whether you want a water birth, and if so, what temperature you want the water and whether you want your baby born in the water or not.

Local mom Michelle Hecker Davis, who has had both of her children at home with Church's help, admits that she was a bit scared by the idea of a home birth initially.

"Your initial reaction is the hospital is the safest place because everyone knows what they're doing," Davis says.

But, she adds, no complication arises without showing a red flag.

"Debi monitors everything during pregnancy, from your blood pressure to heart rate, which could pop up as a sign that it won't be a normal birthing process," Davis says. "Because of that, Debi has a very low rate of emergency situations in which she has to go to the hospital."

Davis' pregnancy was considered high risk due to gestational diabetes, which can cause complications for the mother



and baby, including an increased likelihood of needing a C-section due to excessive infant weight. But with Church's help, Davis was able to keep her condition under control by addressing the root of the problem and monitoring what she ate very closely.

"It was so empowering," Davis

says of her birthing experience. "It's scary, but once you get through it, you're like, 'Yes, I did that!' It gives you more control over the entire process and more freedom, which helps move the birthing process along faster and more naturally, and the recovery time is much quicker."



DELIVERY OPTIONS: HOME OR HOSPITAL?

The benefits of having a doula

WHETHER YOU OPT FOR A HOSPITAL OR HOME BIRTH, A DOULA CAN HELP MAKE SURE THE PROCESS GOES ACCORDING TO YOUR BIRTH PLAN WHILE HELPING TO EASE YOU THROUGH THE PHYSICAL BIRTHING PROCESS. DOULAS ARE LIKE PERSONAL TRAINERS OR COACHES FOR BIRTH AND OFFER EMOTIONAL, PHYSICAL AND EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER LABOR.

Amy Poarch has been a certified birth doula for 12 years.

"We bring something that no one else does," Poarch says. "Your care provider and nurse are taking care of Mom and baby's health. Doulas are there for Mom and her support [team]'s comfort, to make sure they have all the information about what is going on and their options, to encourage them and help them when things do not go as planned."

Doulas are there throughout the entire labor and delivery process. They are trained in helping the mother cope with labor, and offer guidance to family or friends around the bedside on how to help.

"We take care of a multitude little tasks — getting Mom a drink, snacks; making sure Mom goes to the bathroom; getting a cold washcloth, etc.," Poarch says.

For Holli Turner, one of Poarch's clients, having a doula helped her have two natural births after her first child was delivered via C-section. VBACs, or vaginal births after Cesarean, can lead to complications and emergency C-sections.

"After having the C-section, I had side effects to the pain medication for the first few days. I don't remember a lot of the first few days of my oldest child's life," Turner says of her decision to have a natural birth for her second and third children.

Turner's first child's birth was not at all what she had expected. She didn't have a lot of education about birth, but she knew enough to know she did not want to be induced, and she did not want to have a C-section unless it was necessary.

"I felt a little cheated out of my birth, even though there were reasons for needing the C-section," she says. "The baby had been turned face-up, and after having an epidural, I couldn't move around to get her to move."

So, with her second child, Turner was determined to have a different birthing experience. A friend who was also pregnant at the time told her about VBACs, and if she met the criteria to be considered for a VBAC, having a doula would increase the success rate, her friend told her.

Turner's second and third children were also turned face-



up, but because she opted to not have an epidural and because she had the assistance of a doula, Turner was able to move around and get the babies to turn on their own so she could deliver them naturally.

In comparison to her first birth, Turner says, "The experience was amazingly different. The recovery time was better. I was up within 30 minutes to an hour after my second, and it was pretty much the same way with my third."

Turner adds that having a doula there who knows the process and knows your fears or anxieties is a tremendous help in reducing the risk of complications.

"I think especially for a first-time mom, it helps to have an advocate for things like your birth plan and to keep you level and focused on what you're doing," Turner says. "It's kind of like having an extra helping hand that's on your side when you're in the hospital."

ULTIMATELY, WHERE AND HOW YOU CHOOSE TO GIVE BIRTH IS A PERSONAL DECISION. EVERY MOTHER IS DIFFERENT, AND EVERY PREGNANCY IS DIFFERENT.

It is up to you to decide what makes you most comfortable. But one thing that is a must in all circumstances is to be well-educated and well-prepared. This way, you can make your own educated decisions according to your personal preferences.

"It's important to hear other people's stories and research it, but if you can tune in and listen to what your instinct is, you'll know exactly what to do," Davis says. ■