

# Your Guide to Birth Options: Understanding Where and How to Give Birth



## Highlights

Where you give birth to your baby is your choice.

You may give birth at home with a midwife, in a public or private hospital, or at a birthing centre.

Ensure you are well informed about the risks and benefits of birthing options before you make a choice.

Your chance of pregnancy complications may impact where you can have your baby.

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## Safe Birth Options

Giving birth is generally considered a safe process, though complications can arise that may affect either the mother, the baby, or both. Most births are uncomplicated, but certain risk factors may increase the chance of complications. Common risks include:

Heart or kidney disease

Diabetes

High blood pressure and pre-eclampsia

During pregnancy and birth, your healthcare team will monitor you and your baby for any potential risks. They will be prepared to manage these risks in the best possible way to ensure a safe delivery.

## **Choosing the Right Place to Give Birth**

There are several options for where you can give birth, and your choice will depend on factors such as your health, preferences, and the availability of services in your area. Here are the main options for giving birth:

At home with a registered midwife

At a midwifery unit or birthing centre

At a hospital with midwives and obstetricians

Your likelihood of pregnancy complications may play a role in determining the best location for your birth. Additionally, access to these services may vary based on where you live.

You can give birth in either the public or private healthcare system. Maternity care typically includes a combination of care from obstetricians and midwives. It is essential to ensure that your decision is informed, and that you are aware of all your options before choosing where to give birth.

## **Birth with an Independent Midwife**

Some women choose to hire an independent midwife for their birth. An independent midwife is a professional who works privately rather than being employed by a hospital. If you choose to use an independent midwife, they must

be registered with the appropriate regulatory body to ensure they meet required standards.

An independent midwife will provide care throughout your pregnancy, during labour and birth, and after your baby is born. They can offer support in a hospital setting as well if that is your preference. Additionally, a midwife should always be present if you plan to give birth at home.

## **Home Birth**

If you have a normal, healthy pregnancy and both you and your baby are in good health, you may consider giving birth at home. However, home birth may not be a safe option if complications arise during pregnancy. For instance, home birth is generally not recommended if:

You are expecting twins

Your baby is breech

You've had a caesarean section in the past

In any case, a registered midwife or doctor should be present to assist with the birth. Some public hospitals and birth centres also offer home birth services, which can provide you with more flexibility and options for delivery.

## **Midwifery Units and Birth Centres**

Midwifery units or birth centres are another option for giving birth. Birth centres tend to offer a more homely and relaxed environment compared to a traditional hospital maternity ward. They are a popular choice for women who want a less clinical, more natural experience.

Birth centres are generally more focused on midwifery-led care and offer less medical intervention. However, there are some important things to consider when choosing this option:

You may need to be transferred to a hospital if complications arise during labour.

Certain types of pain relief, such as epidurals, may not be available at a birth centre.

A birth centre may not be suitable if you have an increased risk of pregnancy complications or have experienced complications in previous births.

If you're considering giving birth at a midwifery unit or birth centre, it's crucial to check with the facility about the types of services they offer and whether they are a good fit for your specific needs.

One of the advantages of giving birth at a birth centre is that you are likely to be able to leave the centre and go home 24 hours after giving birth, if you and your baby are well. Additionally, midwives will often provide follow-up care at home to help with breastfeeding and general postnatal support.

## **Hospital Births**

Most women choose to give birth in a hospital, whether it is a public or private facility. Hospital births are generally considered safe and well-equipped to handle any emergencies or complications that may arise.

In a hospital, you will be cared for by a team of midwives employed by the hospital. Your doctor will also be kept informed and may be present at the birth. You will have the ability to make choices about the type of care you receive, and if there is more than one hospital in your area, you can choose which one to go to.

In a public hospital, costs may be covered if you have a valid health insurance plan or government health coverage. Some of the advantages of giving birth in a hospital include:

- Access to anaesthetists, who can provide pain relief such as epidurals
- Access to neonatologists and paediatricians, who specialize in newborn care
- Availability of other specialist services if required
- The ability to have a caesarean section if necessary
- Easy access to a special care baby unit or neonatal intensive care unit if your baby needs extra care

There are some things to consider with a hospital birth. For example:

You may be encouraged to leave the hospital soon after birth, though midwives

will visit you at home for continued support.

You may meet different doctors or midwives during your pregnancy, which can impact continuity of care.

## **Private Health System Births**

Choosing to give birth in the private healthcare system can offer several advantages, such as:

The ability to choose a private hospital or a public hospital with private wards  
The option to choose your obstetrician  
Access to additional comforts and a more personalized experience

If you have private health insurance, it may cover some of the costs associated with childbirth, including accommodation and other services. It's important to check with your insurance provider to understand the coverage for your pregnancy, birth, and postnatal care.

If you don't have private health insurance, you can pay for private care out of pocket. Private obstetricians are typically members of professional organizations, and you can also opt to receive care from a general practitioner obstetrician.

When you receive private care, you will have regular appointments with your obstetrician and may also work with a midwife. Private hospitals typically offer a more luxurious experience, with more choices and comforts during your stay.

Postnatal care will be provided by hospital midwives and your obstetrician.

## **Making an Informed Birth Decision**

Choosing where to give birth is a personal decision, and you have the right to change your mind at any time. To make an informed choice, you should gather as much information as possible. You and your birth partner should have a clear understanding of the different options and the risks and benefits associated with each.

Some useful resources for obtaining information include:

Your midwife

Local hospital maternity units and birthing centres

Your doctor

Relevant websites for maternity services

Here are some questions to ask before deciding on a hospital or birth centre:

What happens if I need to be transferred from a birth unit to a hospital?

Can we tour the maternity facilities before the birth?

When can I discuss my birth plan with my care team?

What pain relief options will be available to me?

What birthing aids, such as birthing chairs or bean bags, are available?

How long will I and my baby be required to stay in the hospital?

## **Tools and Assistance**

Here are some helpful tools and resources to assist you in making informed decisions about your birth options:

### **Birth Plan Templates**

A birth plan is a document that helps you communicate your preferences for labor and delivery to your healthcare providers. This includes your preferences for pain relief, who you want present during labor, your desired birth position, and more. There are many online templates available that you can fill out based on your preferences and share with your medical team ahead of time.

### **Risk Assessment Tools**

Many healthcare providers offer risk assessment tools to evaluate the likelihood of complications during pregnancy and birth. These tools often include questions about your medical history, current health status, and pregnancy progression. Understanding your risk factors can help guide your decision about where to give birth.

### **Decision-Making Guides**

A decision-making guide is a resource that helps you weigh the pros and cons of each birth option (hospital, home birth, midwifery unit, etc.). These guides typically provide insights into the potential benefits and challenges associated with each setting, helping you make an informed choice based on your personal needs and preferences.

### **Pain Relief Options Charts**

Many hospitals and birth centers provide charts or pamphlets that outline available pain relief options during labor, such as epidurals, medication, water immersion, breathing techniques, and more. These resources allow you to compare your options and make decisions about how you'd like to manage pain during childbirth.

### **Local Support Networks**

Support networks are groups or organizations where expectant parents can connect with others to share experiences and advice. These networks may offer in-person meetings, online forums, or social media groups, and can help you learn more about different birth experiences, support services, and available resources in your area.

### **Childbirth Education Classes**

Many hospitals and birthing centers offer childbirth education classes for expectant parents. These classes typically cover topics like the stages of labor, pain management, newborn care, and what to expect during your hospital stay. Classes can be in-person or online, and may be tailored to different types of birth experiences, such as natural or medicated births.

### **Home Birth Planning Resources**

If you're considering a home birth, it's essential to gather information and resources about how to plan for a safe and successful delivery at home. Some home birth planning resources include guidelines for selecting a qualified midwife, creating a safe birth space, and preparing for emergencies.

## **Postnatal Care Support**

After your baby is born, it's important to have a plan for postnatal care. Many hospitals, midwifery units, and private midwives offer postpartum care, including breastfeeding support, mental health check-ins, and baby care guidance. Look for resources that offer advice on recovery after childbirth, as well as follow-up visits to ensure the well-being of both you and your baby.