

Choosing a Care Provider

How to Choose the Midwife or Doctor Who Will Best Support You During Pregnancy, Labor and Birth

Your choice of caregiver will affect how happy you are with your care, as well as your risk of having procedures such as cesarean surgery or episiotomy. The choice can also affect your health and that of your baby—for better or worse. Here are some tips on the best way to approach this key decision.

Think about what is important to you.

It goes without saying that you want a birth that is healthy for you and your baby. It is important to also ask yourself what else matters? Would you like to avoid surgery? Have an easy recovery after the birth? Have many pain relief options available? Get off to a good start with breastfeeding? Have cultural or family customs respected?

Think about what type of provider is the best fit. Here are some of your options:

Midwife: Research tells us that, for most women, midwifery care offers benefits without any risks. These benefits include a greater chance of having a vaginal birth and a lower risk of the mother or baby having health problems after birth. Midwives tend to see pregnancy, labor, and birth as normal, healthy processes, and they are experts at helping these processes unfold with as few interventions as possible. However, they are also trained to use interventions when necessary. Women who develop health problems in pregnancy or need cesarean surgery will have to switch to a doctor's care.

Obstetrician: Obstetricians are specially trained to provide medical or surgical care to prevent or treat health problems in pregnancy and the complications that can occur in labor and birth. They also take care of healthy, low-risk women, either directly or in collaboration with midwives.

Family Practice Doctor: Family doctors are general practitioners who take care of the health needs of the whole family, including women during pregnancy and birth. Most family physicians do not perform cesarean surgery, so women needing cesareans will switch to an obstetrician's care.

Gather information and Recommendations.

Find out more about the beliefs and practices of different providers in your area, focusing on what is most important to you. Ask your friends and family members who have given birth about their care providers. Local childbirth educators, doulas, or pregnancy support groups may offer a good sense of which providers offer excellent care. You can also search for reviews of local providers (as well as hospitals and birth centers) at TheBirthSurvey.com.

Interview Care Providers.

Talk to several care providers before making choosing one. Discussing the topics below will help you determine if they are a good match for you.

What are your intervention rates?

The intervention rates of the person caring for you are among the most important factors determining whether you will experience these interventions yourself. Many experts agree that care providers should have the following intervention rates:

- cesarean surgery rate close to 15 percent
- induction rate close to 10 percent
- episiotomy rate close to 5 percent

Rates higher than these can indicate an increase risk of health problems without improving outcomes for mothers and babies.

What are your usual practices in labor?

Find out what the care provider recommends regarding the following topics:

- Walking, moving around, and changing position
- The role of my labor support team, which may include a doula
- Eating and drinking
- Intravenous lines (IVs)
- Monitoring the baby's heartbeat
- Speeding up labor by breaking the bag of waters or giving Pitocin
- The pushing stage of labor
- Care of the baby immediately after birth