



## PREPARING FOR A HOMEBIRTH

### PRACTICAL PREPARATION

By your 37th week, you and your baby are usually safe to birth at home. Therefore, I recommend having the following on hand by the time you enter your last month of pregnancy:

- Old bed sheets for labor and/or after birth
- Plastic covering for floor or bed (shower curtain or flannel-backed picnic tablecloth works well)
- Several old washcloths for warm compresses
- Clean cookie sheet or other tray (I will cover it to serve as a portable instrument tray)
- Empty laundry basket or other similar sized basket or container
- Two large plastic trash bags
- Flashlight
- Hydrogen peroxide (for stain removal, usually not needed, but just in case)
- Your favorite energy drinks. Sugar and caffeine can have a place in labor!
- Your favorite energy snacks. Here's a popular recipe:

#### Energy Balls

1 part tahini  
1 part peanut butter  
honey to taste

chopped nuts (walnuts, macadamia, pecans)  
carob chips/chocolate chips

Stir all ingredients together until well-mixed, form into balls, refrigerate until labor!

- Birth kit – You can order the custom kit at [birthwithlove.com](http://birthwithlove.com) (follow prompts to Andersson, Ingrid) or you can call to order: 1-800-434-4915. This midwife-supplier also offers the appropriate oral vitamin K for newborn administration. Alternatively, you can purchase the herbs and other items yourself. Items you will need include: 1 package super large sanitary pads or Depends; 2 packages regular size sanitary pads; 1 package absorbent under-pads (Assure, Chucks, etc); squeeze bottle (boil for 10 minutes if recycling a used bottle); loose-leaf herbs. Buy ½ cup of at least one herb from each class: anti-infective (garlic, uva ursi, rosemary, thyme, myrrh, etc), anti-inflammatory (sage, witch hazel, St. John's Wort, etc), and tissue healer (comfrey, calendula).
- If you plan to use the birth pool, please buy a new hose for filling the tub and have an inexpensive hand mirror for use in the water. Extra towels are handy. I recommend using a rubber hose or food-grade hose, as these are non-PVC. While these are available at most hardware suppliers, Ace Hardware on Williamson St will be most helpful. Make sure you have the proper adapter for attaching your hose to a hot water faucet. Turn your water heater to maximum in early labor for more rapid filling of the birth pool.

In the laundry basket or other container, place items for your baby:

- Several clean old towels
- Several receiving blankets
- Two baby hats
- Two diapers

By the last month of pregnancy I also recommend having:

- A couple good first-year parenting reference books (Dr. Sears, Happiest Baby on the Block, Smart Medicine for a Healthier Child, etc)
- A breastfeeding reference book (La Leche League books are good)
- A breast pump (avoid Gerber and Evenflo)

### Earth-Friendly

Relative to hospital birth, birth at home leaves a “small footprint.” However, there are further choices you can make to minimize waste during birth and postpartum. I will support you in any green choices you make and can help direct you to non-disposable or recycled options.

## **Preparing for the possibility of transport to hospital**

The transport rate for home birth is very low but the possibility must be considered in your planning. I recommend that you pre-register at your hospital of choice, as well as the hospital nearest you, if these are not the same. Have appropriate emergency phone numbers handy (pet care, child support, local hospital, etc). Have your car available with sufficient gas and an infant car seat installed. If you have any questions regarding installation, your local fire department offers a free check that the car seat is secured appropriately. Almost always, transport is non-emergent and occurs in our personal vehicles.

## **People at the birth**

It is your home, your labor, and your birth. You decide who may attend. People who attend should be comfortable with your choice to birth at home. You must feel completely at ease and safe with everyone present. I can't stress enough how important it is to avoid inviting someone out of a sense of guilt or duty. Pregnancy is a time to be selfish, to heed your deepest instincts about comfort and safety. Some people feel labor and birth should be as private as making love, while others welcome a party atmosphere. Whichever way you lean, it is important that each person at the birth – your midwife and her assistant(s) included – knows that if his or her presence is making your work more difficult or distracted, you may ask him or her to change their behavior or to leave your labor space.

Most people at a birth prefer to have a role, to help, rather than stand by and watch. They can prepare food for the family, tend to older children, do laundry, run errands, take pictures, etc. If pictures or video footage are important to you, assign someone other than your primary support person to the job.

## **Children and pets at birth**

Children and pets generally are very wise in the presence of labor and birth. They will interpret and believe whatever you tell or show them about labor and birth, because they have not been shaped by fear-inducing images. Many labor sounds and positions mimic everyday ones. Prenatally, children can be prepared with fun role-play of moans and groans and various labor positions. “This is what mama might be like when the baby is coming....” You can also watch videos, read sibling books, and discuss the child's potential role or job at birth, such as offering mom water or cutting the umbilical cord.

I highly recommend choosing a familiar person other than your primary support partner for the child support role. Your child may want to leave the room now and then, want food or to go outside, and the child helper must be willing to miss the birth if need be - or more commonly, be present at the birth when that is your child's (and your) wishes.

## **MIND & BODY PREPARATION**

### **Love and labor**

The hormones that peak in love-making and are elevated when we eat our favorite food or feel relaxed and well cared for are the same hormones that come into play in late pregnancy and really kick in during labor. I recommend giving yourself “love baths” all through pregnancy – your labor will flow more easily!

“Love baths” includes weekly prenatal massages the last month of pregnancy for the increased oxytocin and endorphin release that comes with deep relaxation, as well as optimal fetal positioning. I have observed regular prenatal massage to have an excellent track record for preventing postdates pregnancy and malpositioned babies. Madison offers several skilled prenatal massage therapists.

“Love baths” may also include funny movies, pleasurable sex, dinners with friends or at your favorite restaurants, naps, walks, positive affirmations or whatever you tell yourself that helps redirect recreational worrying and irrational self-doubts. Many women who have given birth before are surprised to find they have increased anxiety with subsequent births. Practice affirmations as you drive, walk, brush your teeth, etc. They should be meaningful

to you, in your own words, and in the present tense, such as:

*My body knows how to birth.*

*350,000 other women are laboring with me at this moment.*

Begin talking to your baby every day. Chant your baby into a good labor position:

*Head down,*

*chin tucked,*

*back to belly,*

*hands to sides –*

*yay baby! yay baby!*

## **Health and immunity**

You and your baby share the health of your internal and external environment. A well-balanced nutritional and bacterial ecosystem is important for your own and your baby's immunity. Besides a high-quality, food-based prenatal vitamin, I recommend ingesting probiotics daily in pregnancy through foods with living enzymes and cultures. In the last trimester, I recommend a supplement form of probiotic, such as Florajen 3. Eat plenty of other immune boosters that work for you, such as garlic, vitamin C, plenty of vegetables and fruits, etc. 2000-4000 IU daily of vitamin D3 is important on many levels of health and well-being. If you do not get much direct sun exposure, I recommend a supplement. Food sources of omega-3s, such as walnuts, ground flax seeds, and animal foods from grazed, grass-finished animals, or from cod liver oil, are important for both you and your baby. Women who take extra calcium and magnesium in pregnancy tend to have less cramping in pregnancy and after birth. Women who take alfalfa or another natural vitamin K source have less bleeding.

Hand-washing is important for your own and your baby's protection. However, antibacterial soaps and cleansers can disrupt your beneficial bacteria balance and have not been found in research to reduce illness. Use plain water or more natural soaps that do not diminish beneficial bacteria or contribute to the problem of resilient bacterial strains.

Daily outside activity is crucial for an enjoyable late pregnancy and is another way of giving yourself a "love bath." Our bodies and babies require sunshine and fresh air, and our cells need the oxygenation that comes with exercise. You can aid your baby into a good position with well-rounded activities that are not repetitive or painful, such as housecleaning, gardening, and walking.

## **LABOR & BIRTH**

Labor usually starts with mild contractions that begin to gain momentum, growing stronger and closer together. I recommend doing whatever you normally do at that given time of night or day for as long as possible. If labor lasts many hours, you'll be glad you paced yourself – went back to sleep, ate a big supper, kept your appointments, etc – even though you may be very excited. Labor that is here to stay will not go away or lessen with normal activities.

After some unpredictable number of days, or hours, or minutes, your contractions will become regular and long – every 5 minutes or less from the beginning of one contraction to the beginning of the next and lasting at least 50-60 seconds. At this time your body will begin to take over direction from your mind and probably keep you moving. This is usually active labor and doesn't go away until your baby is in your arms. The work of active labor is to move and rotate your baby's head through your pelvic tissue, muscles, and bones – the more you move, the more you help your baby descend and rotate.

### **When to call**

Call as soon as you perceive that momentum beginning, as described above. A long "heads-up" is really helpful for me in arranging schedules and assistants, but sometimes labor sneaks up on us – I'm always prepared to come right away. Call me *at any time* if you:

- have any concerns or questions;

- haven't felt the baby move for longer than usual;
- think your bag of waters might have broken;
- are actively bleeding;
- have severe abdominal or back pain even between contractions.

### **If your water breaks**

The bag of water breaks before labor in about 10% of women. Sometimes several hours pass before labor starts in earnest, even if you had some cramping or contractions right afterwards. Most women birth within 24 hours of rupture, almost all within 48 hours.

Rupture of membranes may be felt as a "pop," followed by a trickle of fluid or a gush. There may be no fluid at first, especially if you are lying down. If you detect a trickle or gush of fluid that is different from previous secretions, call me. If your baby's head was high at our last prenatal visit, stay in bed until you call me. I will ask you about the time of rupture, and color, amount, and odor of fluid, as well as your baby's movements. Together we will discuss a plan based on your individual situation.

If your bag of water is ruptured, it means that the protective membranes enclosing your baby are open, and over time, your baby can become increasingly vulnerable to outside bacteria and possible infection. Therefore, avoid putting anything in your vagina and don't take a bath until you're well into active labor. Change your underwear and pad frequently. Wipe from front to back when using the toilet. Take your temperature every 4 hours.

### **The birth**

I will come to your house when you are in active labor. As with all aspects of your care, my assistant(s) and I will individualize our labor support to your personality and preferences and communicate as clearly and openly as possible at all times. We regularly assess your own and your baby's well-being and offer emotional and hands-on support to you and your family as needed or desired. My assistant(s) will stay to help as long as necessary. I will not hesitate to discuss transferring to the hospital if that seems indicated to me or to you. Depending on the indication, this may be a gradual decision or rapid implementation. In the event of transfer, I will accompany you to the hospital and serve as advocate and support person for you and your baby.

We do all we can to ensure your baby is welcomed gently and joyfully into your arms, whether at home or in hospital.

### **IMMEDIATE POSTPARTUM**

After the birth, I stay with you and assess your recovery and your baby's adaptation for a minimum of 2 hours. I will review postpartum self and baby cares and warning signs. I remain available by phone around the clock and return within 36 hours after the birth, as well as at 3 days postpartum. I will file the birth certificate worksheet and perform the newborn screen for metabolic disorders, if desired, and offer you newborn hearing screening. I create a labor and birth summary for you, in which we can record your baby's footprints, if you wish.

If there is any concern regarding you or the baby, I will help facilitate medical care or other assistance and/or see you myself as often as necessary. If you choose to see a Family Practice physician or pediatrician by 2 weeks of age, I will fax the birth record to that practitioner. I will remain on call for you through 6 weeks postpartum.

Please never hesitate to address questions and concerns with me regarding any of the above. You can also review my website pages for further details. In the last month of pregnancy, I will give you a hand-out that aims to help you prepare for the "fourth stage of labor," the postpartum period.