

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Childbirth Options

Childbirth presents a variety of options that require careful consideration to make the experience a safe and comfortable one for both mother and child.

It’s worth putting time and effort into the planning and preparing for this main event in your life; here are some issues to think about:

- What kind of childbirth experience do I want for myself and my baby? And what options are available to me and my baby?
- What is the most important factor to consider during the labor and delivery process? Where do I want to have my baby?
- Do I want a midwife to attend at the labor and delivery? What are the advantages/disadvantages of having a midwife?
- Are there childbirth classes available in my area that my coach and I can attend to learn more about the process and what options are out there for us?
- What medications am I willing to consider during labor and delivery? At what point am I willing to consider medications?
- What resources or other support do I need to accomplish my childbirth goals? Relaxation equipment and techniques? Focussing objects? Comfort items?
- Who would I like to be present during the labor and delivery of my baby?

Natural childbirth. Natural childbirth is gaining popularity as women are electing to have a midwife attend them through their labor and delivery at home, in a birthing centre or at a hospital. Women choosing home or birth centre births are opting for a self-directed process that is unhurried, safe and comfortable. Today, hospitals are more flexible regarding childbirth options and encourage a process that will make the mother more comfortable and relaxed throughout labor and delivery.

Birthing centres. Birthing rooms at birthing centres are set up to resemble the environment and comfort of home. They are equipped with hot tubs or whirlpool baths, the lighting is low, the mood intimate and the environment soothing. Mothers are encouraged to pay attention to the needs of their body and to labor in positions most comfortable for them. Immediately following the birth, babies are given to the mothers to promote mother-child bonding.

Home births. At a home birth, mother and caregiver prepare the birth setting; extended family members or friends may attend a home birth, depending on the preference of the parent(s)-to-be. Midwives generally attend home births and bring all the necessary medical equipment. The comfort and preferences of the mother are the focus, and the atmosphere is relaxed and soothing.

Waterbirths. Waterbirths, at home or at birthing centres, provide a gentle transition for the baby from the womb to the outside world. Tubs of water are heated to between 33 and 38 degrees Celsius to encourage relaxation of the mother's back and pelvic muscles, and encourage the baby's descent down the birth canal. The focus during a waterbirth is on the transition that the baby makes into the world.

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Midwives. For low-risk births, midwives are an increasingly popular option. Midwives are women with specific training in childbirth; they are available to attend labor and delivery at home, at a birthing centre and at the hospital. Generally, the midwife will help the mother in whatever way she can to encourage a natural childbirth.

Lamaze method. The Lamaze method teaches expecting mothers techniques to strengthen the muscles needed for childbirth, as well as relaxation methods, breathing and focusing exercises. Lamaze childbirth classes are widely available at hospitals and clinics, and are usually taken by mothers and coaches midway through the pregnancy; to find out about classes in your area, speak with your physician or call your local hospital.

Medications and Childbirth

There are several medication options available during labor and delivery, including:

- **Sedatives and tranquilizers.** Sedatives and tranquilizers are administered during early or mid-labor. Their role is to help the mother relax between contractions.
- **Analgesic pain relievers.** Analgesics are narcotics that help diminish the pain and can be used if labor pains are intense or the mother is extremely tense. An example of such an analgesic is Demerol.
- **Local anaesthetics.** Local anaesthetics are generally used when an episiotomy is required, and are administered before the episiotomy is performed.
- **Regional anaesthetics.** Epidurals and spinal blocks are examples of regional anaesthetics. These anaesthetics block the pain in a specific area of the body. The mother does not usually feel sleepy with regional anaesthetics.
- **General anaesthetics.** General anaesthetics are sometimes used before caesarean deliveries. They render the mother unconscious during the procedure.

Caesarean Delivery

When there is a physical or medical complication identified prior to childbirth, or if a high risk situation arises during the course of labor or delivery, a caesarean (or C-section) delivery may be the best option for a safe and healthy delivery for both mother and baby. A caesarean delivery is a surgical procedure whereby an incision is made in the abdominal and uterine walls and the baby is removed from the uterus; the procedure is very quick and can be done under general or regional anaesthetic.

Whether you're pregnant with you first, second or third child, it's important to review all the birthing options available to you. Your preferences may have changed since your last childbirth. If this is your first child, be sure to do your research and discuss all options with your doctor; he or she will be able to suggest a method best suited for you and your pregnancy.