



# Healthy Mother

## Wellness & Care

Enabling Healthy Pregnancy, Childbirth & Fitness

### Questions to Ask Your Hospital about your Pregnancy and Childbirth

1. Mother-friendly hospitals allow the birthing mother to decide who should be with her during her labor. Whether it is your husband, parent or relative, friend, or someone who you feel can support you in your labor, such as a doula, your hospital should respect your wish to have that person(s) be around you and care for you. A labor support expert is one who has the medical and psychological training and experience to help women cope with labor and childbirth, and gives physical and moral support to birthing mothers. The labor support person **never** leaves the birthing mother and is her advocate along with the mother's husband and family. She encourages, supports and comforts the mother whenever the mother needs it.
2. Mother-friendly hospitals are open and transparent about how they handle every aspect of the birthing process. You should ask how often your hospital gives drugs to mothers to speed up labor or birth. Does your hospital encourage labor and birth to begin on its own? Does your hospital staff tell you about what is their c-section rate? How often do they use Epidural pain medication? (Epidural has many side effects proven by evidence-based research). According to the World Health Organization, good hospitals should not routinely use drugs such as Pitocin to speed up labor or birth. The maximum rate of use of Pitocin should be only 1 in 10 mothers. Further, good hospitals should not have Episiotomy rates of more than 20% (This procedure is the making of a surgical cut in the opening of the vagina to make it bigger. In most cases, it is not a necessary procedure). Their c-section rate should not be more than 15% according to the WHO. Mothers who have had a previous c-section can have a subsequent natural birth. Look for a hospital which will support you in your wish to have a normal subsequent birth (VBAC – Vaginal Delivery after Cesarian).
3. Mother-friendly hospitals allow women unlimited Freedom of Movement unless there is a medical condition which prevents her from moving about. The hospital staff should allow and encourage you to walk, move around and choose whichever position that helps you be comfortable during labor and birth. Good hospitals **never** force a mother to lie on her back and have her legs up in stirrups for birth, nor do they use practices such as blindfolding etc.
4. Mother-friendly hospitals use only those methods and procedures that have been proven to be better by scientific and evidence-based research. Look for hospitals that follow this practice. Many hospitals follow practices that have not been proven to be best for the mother or her baby. Some of the practices which have not been proven to be best for mother or baby include:
  - Continuous Electronic Fetal Monitor – At many hospitals mothers are hooked to a machine which monitors the baby's heart all the time. This is not necessary if the baby is healthy. Instead, a nurse can take the heart rate reading at regular intervals. Hooking up to a continuous fetal monitor

Adapted from "Mother-friendly Childbirth Initiative", a publication of Coalition for Improving Maternity Services (CIMS)



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prevents the mother from moving around and therefore does not facilitate natural childbirth.

- Hospital staff should not break your bag or waters early in your labor
- The hospital should not hook you to an IV machine (in case it is medically necessary, they can tape the IV needle to your arm and give you the ability to move around.
- Hospital staff should not prevent you from having a light food or drink during labor.

For most mothers the above practices should not be used unless there is a medical reason for doing so. Hospitals which regularly follow above practices on otherwise healthy mothers are not mother and baby friendly.

5. Evidence-based research has indicated that the single-most contributing factor to a fulfilling childbirth experience is the presence of **continuous support during labor**. The people who are responsible for your care should know how to help you cope with labor. They should know ways to manage labor pain that **do not involve drugs**. They should empathize with you and not look at you as a patient, but as someone who is about to experience one of most exciting and life-changing moments. They should know about ways to help you be calm, have the strength to labor, manage pain by changing positions, helping you relax by having a warm bath, or massage or by listening to music.

These comfort measures help you deal with labor in a much better way and help you be in control. At hospitals which are mother-baby friendly, the people who care for you will not try to push pain medication to you unless there is a true medical requirement. (You should know that all drugs you take go to the baby as well)

6. Mother-friendly hospitals allow mothers and families to touch, hold and to breastfeed babies as much as they can. Even if your baby is born early or has a medical problem at birth, if you are able to hold your baby, you should be allowed to do so and to breastfeed within first hour of birth, failing which, at least have skin-to-skin contact with your baby. This promotes bonding, and enhances the sense of satisfaction for you and well being and comfort for your baby.
7. Mother-friendly hospitals will encourage only breastfeeding, unless you are medically unable to breastfeed your baby. People who care for you at the hospital should show you how to breastfeed, and how to keep the milk coming in even if you have to be away from your baby for work or other reasons. Hospitals should encourage mothers and babies to be together immediately after birth, or at the least, be in the same room. They should encourage you to feed your baby whenever he wants and how much ever he wants, rather than at certain intervals

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