

Q and A: Importance of a birth plan

April 20 2022, by Cynthia Weiss



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DEAR MAYO CLINIC: I'm expecting my first baby and feeling a range of emotions, from anticipation to apprehension, for labor and delivery. A friend suggested that I create a birth plan to identify my wishes for labor and after the baby is born. Why is it important to have a birth plan and discuss it with my health care team before I go into labor?

ANSWER: Congratulations! Adding a new member to the family is an exciting time. You've likely been planning—stocking up on diapers, newborn clothes and blankets, as well as considering what you'll name your little one.

Before your baby is born, you should create a plan leading up to the delivery and immediately following the birth. This is known as a birth plan, and it's an important piece of two-way communication between you and your [health](#) care team. It's a way for you to communicate your preferences to your health care team during your [labor](#) and after the birth of your baby. It also allows you to become informed of all your options during labor.

Here are [answers](#) to some common questions about birth plans:

Why is a birth plan necessary?

A birth plan is a way for you to communicate your wishes to your health care team during your labor and after the birth of your baby. Each birth is a unique experience.

Creating a birth plan empowers you to become informed of all your options during labor. At the same time, it's a tool to let the team caring for you know about your preferences.

Do you need to write your own birth plan?

You don't have to create your birth plan from scratch. Many hospitals have a standard form or booklet that you can complete at your convenience.

It's recommended that you review your birth plan with your [primary](#)

[health care](#) professional during your pregnancy. For example, if your pregnancy is high-risk, your health care team may recommend certain things on your birth plan. It's a good idea to have this conversation before you arrive at the hospital for the delivery.

What needs to be included in the birth plan?

Although you may have in your mind how you want your baby's birth to be, your choices may not be shared effectively with your health care team if you don't have a birth plan.

Some questions you may [answer](#) in your birth plan include:

- Who do you want present in the delivery room?
- Do you want medications for pain management? If so, what type of medications do you want?
- Do you want a natural birth and use alternate measures for comfort?
- Do you want to move freely during labor?
- Do you want to use hydrotherapy?
- Do you want your baby continuously monitored?

These are just a few items that can be included in your birth plan.

After the baby is born, how do you indicate your preferences?

A birth plan does not end with the delivery of your new baby. The care team will want to know how you want your baby to be cared for in the hospital. For example, explain who will cut the [umbilical cord](#), change the baby's first diaper and give the baby his or her first bath.

In addition, the birth plan can indicate how you wish to feed your baby. Identifying [breast milk](#) or formula as a nutritional preference is an important item for your birth plan. Religious or cultural preferences should be included in your plan, as well.

Your birth plan should be tailored to meet your personal wishes. Keep in mind, your health care team may need to depart from the plan to ensure the safest possible delivery.

The goal during [delivery](#) is to have a healthy mom and a healthy baby. Your [birth](#) plan can help communicate your preferences to the care team during one of the most exciting times of your life.

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