

Writing your Birth Preferences

December 2023

What are birth preferences?

Birth is an incredibly transformative time for families, and we support you to be informed and feel confident in the lead up to and during your labour and birth.

Creating a list of birth preferences is a personal and important part of preparing for labour and birth. We welcome the opportunity to discuss what is important to you.

It is important to communicate your birth preferences with your care provider and support people. The nature of labour and birth can be quite unpredictable and your preferences will always be considered as part of the process of personalised decision-making.

Below are the suggested steps to help you make a birth preferences list.

Start your research early

It is helpful to think about your birth preferences early in your pregnancy, to give you ample time to research, make decisions, and discuss your wishes with your care provider and support people.

Consider your personal circumstances

- Think about your personal social and emotional wellbeing and how this may impact your preferences.
- Reflect on any cultural/religious beliefs or practices that may be important to you.
- Consider your previous birth experiences (if applicable).
- Discuss your medical history and any specific needs you may have.

Options for you to consider

Your birth environment: Think about place of birth, for example birth unit, birth centre, at home, or the operating theatre when needed. Then how you will create your own birthing space. For example, you may want to consider the use of dim lighting, fairy lights/e-candles, music speakers and oil diffusers.

Pain Management: Think about your preferred pain management and discuss with your support people and care provider your preferences. Example the use of baths, shower, positioning, TENS, nitrous oxide gas, sterile water injections, morphine and epidural.

Interventions: Learn about potential medical interventions and consider in what situations they may be suggested. It is important to consider the pros and cons of each option.

Interventions include:

- Induction and/or augmentation of Labour
- Continuous monitoring of your baby in labour
- Instrumental Birth - forceps or vacuum
- Episiotomy
- Active third stage
- Caesarean birth

Writing down your preferences

We suggest you create a list that outlines your preferences for labour and birth. This list can include

- Your preferred place of birth
- Birth environment
- Pain management options
- Interventions
- Any specific cultural or religious considerations
- Who will be present to support you during labour and birth
- Preferences for immediately postpartum and early newborn care
- Any other specific requests or wishes you may have.

Sharing your preferences

Share your birth preferences with your care provider during an antenatal visit. Your care provider can provide valuable insights about labour and birth and address any concerns you have to then promote informed choices. They will also be able to guide you on hospital policies and usual practice within your chosen place of birth.

Remember

Be prepared to adjust your birth preferences if circumstances change. Your team will communicate any concerns with you and should allow you time to discuss your options with your support people and make an informed decision.

Discuss your preferences: Having discussed your preferences with your care provider, make sure they have a copy in your medical records.

Throughout the labour and birth process, maintain open communication with your care provider. If you have questions or concerns, don't hesitate to ask.

Educate your support people: If you have a birth partner or support person, ensure they are familiar with your birth preferences.

Keep a copy handy: Carry a copy of your birth preferences with you, especially when you're towards the end of your pregnancy. This will ensure that everyone involved in your care is aware of your preferences.

Remember: the primary goal of your birth preferences is to facilitate a positive and safe birthing experience for both you and your baby.