



ESSENTIAL LABOUR SUPPORT GUIDE



Fierce mama Alesha!

PHOTO CREDIT: MAGGART PHOTOGRAPHY

INTRO: BIRTH IN THE TIME OF COVID-19

These are strange and uncomfortable times. Many birthing folks are hearing the difficult news that their doula, and in some cases even their partner, may not be able to attend their births in person. We know this thought may be distressing. Birth is a vulnerable and transformational time. The idea of not having the support team you were hoping for may feel scary. This document is our gift to you to help answer your questions and ease some of your worries. It can serve as your "**pocket doula.**"

A word to partners: Your being calm helps your birthing beloved to be calm. You can trust that if you pay attention to your partner in a calm way, you will be able to provide the support they need. Please remember to feed yourself, stay hydrated, dress comfortably, put the phone away (unless you're with your virtual doula!), and use the call bell if you need assistance, and trust that if the doctors and nurses don't look worried about anything, you generally don't need to be worried either.

WHEN TO GO TO THE HOSPITAL?

For any medical concerns, please contact your care provider. If they cannot be reached, you can always call the case room at the hospital (**available 24/7**) and discuss your symptoms with the labour and delivery nurse.

For normal, uncomplicated labours, you should go to the hospital:

- When contractions have progressed in intensity to the point where you have difficulty holding a conversation during; and/or distractions just aren't cutting it anymore, and you start to "GO INWARD" and feel spacey in your labour; you start to move slowly between contractions.
- If your contractions are making you grunt, and you feel you may have a bowel movement, go quickly.
- If your waters break with an obvious and dramatic gush, it is medically advised to go to the hospital right away.
- If you lose any fluid from the vagina that has a bad odour, and/or is brownish/greenish, go to the hospital.
- If, for no other reason, you get the sense that you should go, **GO...trust your instincts.**

THE HOSPITAL EXPERIENCE

1) Upon arrival at the hospital, you will go to the nurse's station at the birthing center.

The nurse will ask you several questions, such as:

- WHY ARE YOU HERE?
- HOW FAR ALONG IN YOUR PREGNANCY ARE YOU?
- IF IN LABOUR, WHEN DID IT START?
- ANY LIQUID LOST, BLEEDING?
- FREQUENCY/LENGTH OF CONTRACTIONS? HOW LONG HAS THIS BEEN GOING ON (more or less)?

If your partner is present, having these answers ready can allow you to stay fully involved in your labour.

2) You will be assessed in triage.

A nurse or doctor will examine your cervix to see how contractions are making it soften and open, which helps to monitor your labour progress. You will **ignore the number**, as this is just a snapshot of that moment. Remember, labour progress is not logical.

You'll also be put on an external fetal heart monitor for about 20-30 minutes, to obtain a baseline reading of your baby's heart rate.

3) If in active labour, you will be led to your birthing room.

You'll be asked to put on a gown (or, you can choose to labour in your own comfy clothes). A nurse will take your vitals - blood pressure, temperature, you may be asked for a urine sample.

If you need a Cesarean, you will be brought to the operating room, given anesthesia that will make you numb from the chest down, and your baby will be born while you are awake (providing it is not an emergency that needs immediate action, in which case sometimes general anesthesia is necessary). You will recover for a while, with or without your baby, depending upon your hospital and/or your baby's health. Then you will be transferred to your postpartum room.

4) You will labour and deliver in this room until your baby is born.

A nurse will come in and check on you at different times, depending on what stage of labour you're in (more frequently as labour progresses). They will also stay with you throughout the pushing stage. At any time, you can also request assistance with a call bell.

After birth, your baby usually remains on you, on your chest or belly. Your placenta still needs to be born, which normally takes between 5-30 minutes. There may also need to be a few stitches done.

Welcome, baby! Welcome, parents! This is a wonderful time to bond and take it all in. Look at what you've done! At this time, you may want to initiate breastfeeding. Or, you can allow your baby to explore; their reflexes are strong. Whatever feels right for you is perfect.

5) Transfer to the postpartum ward.

Within a couple of hours after giving birth, you will be transferred to the postpartum ward, where you will stay for about 24-36 hours for a vaginal birth, and 3-4 days for a cesarean birth.

SETTING THE SCENE

An optimal environment for birth is one where you feel safe, comfortable, supported, and respected. Everyone is unique in their preferences, but in general, here are some ways you can make a space feel more comfortable so that you can "go there" in your labour. We encourage you to **make this space your own**, as you will be spending some time here.

1) Environment: Dim the lights, draw the curtains; play music that you want to hear; bring along a favourite scent or essential oils. Have blankets and ice chips handy, as a labouring person's body temperature may fluctuate. A LOT.

2) Make use of hospital props: You can have a look around the room or ask the nurse to help locate items. **Washcloths** can be used to cool down; **birth balls** can offer a different position; bins or receptacles are handy for any messes (throwing up).

3) Remember basic needs:

- **Eating and drinking** between contractions can offer energy and hydration to a body that's working incredibly hard
 - **Bathroom breaks**. An empty bladder can allow for more room for baby to descend
 - Have lip balm, hair elastics/headband, a straw for sipping, handy.
-

COMFORT MEASURES FOR LABOUR

With or without a partner, we invite you to explore ways that can make you feel more comfortable during labour.

1. **Conserve your energy!** Rest when you can, between contractions, but also...
2. Alternate moments of rest with movement. Use hospital props to try **different labouring positions** that feel right for you.
3. **One moment at a time.** Don't let your head get ahead of your body.
4. Scan the body for tension (particularly in your jaw and shoulders). **Release.**
5. Switch it up. If you've been in one position for a while, get up and move. If you've been active, let's rest. How about a bath? How about a birth ball? A labouring person is highly suggestible, so partners, offer a different approach if needed.

HANDS-ON RESOURCES:

- **Massage and touch.** Between contractions, massage can help you relax, releasing any tension in your body, allowing for rest. During contractions, a firmer touch- such as pressing on your lower back and/or squeezing your hips- can help with the sensations of labour. If you are alone, a tennis ball held at your lower back while pressed up against a wall can help. Everyone is different, in their preferences for massage and touch during labour. Pregnancy can be a good time to explore these options.
- **Hydrotherapy:** A warm bath or shower can help ease discomfort (if available)
- **Acupressure:** Many points can be done solo

INTERNAL RESOURCES:

Even though we may not have experienced labour before, most if not all of us have been through challenging times, moments of anxiety. And we all deal with anxiety and discomfort differently. We invite you to explore ways that calm you during stressful moments. What helps you get through these moments? What helps you find your calm again? What eases discomfort? What is your resource place- a place, a person, a thought, that brings a smile to your face and makes an otherwise uncomfortable moment more pleasant? And, **how can we leverage all of these internal resources during birth?**

- **Breathe:** Slow, deep belly breaths can help you relax and ease into stronger contractions.
- **Visualization**
- **Vocalization:** Low, open throated sounds. Don't be afraid of making noise if this makes you feel good!
- **Focus:** You may choose to focus on one object in the room during a contraction. Or, to scan the room instead.

A WORD ABOUT ADVOCACY

If your partner is with you, they can be your best advocate, so that you can stay focused on what you're doing. There is no one more emotionally invested in this birth than your partner. Advocacy means standing up for your birthing needs, preferences, and asking questions so that you can make an informed decision that feels right for you. Unless it's an emergency (which, thankfully, it rarely is) you always have time to think about what's being offered or suggested.

USE YOUR B.R.A.I.N.!

Benefits: What are the benefits of what's being proposed to me?

Risks: What are the risks, for me, for the baby, for my labour?

Alternatives: What alternatives are available to me? Can we try something different?

Intuition: What does my intuition say, how do I feel about this?

No/Not now: Sometimes, all that's needed is more time.

If partner is present, please do check in with the labouring person: ***Is that ok with you? How do you feel about that?***

Also important is ensuring that you are aware of your **rights** as a birthing person and knowing what you can ask for when appropriate. See the resource list below for a link to Quebec's pamphlet on "Women's Rights: Pregnancy and Delivery".

POSTPARTUM

Soon after transfer to your postpartum room, your baby will be assessed, measured, and weighed. They will be offered a Vitamin K shot, as well as an erythromycin eye ointment.

If you are in discomfort, please communicate that to your nurse, so they can offer pain relief options.

Skin-to-skin is a wonderful way to get to know your baby. Partners can do this too! It also helps regulate the baby's body temperature, blood sugar, heart rate, breathing, calms them, calms you, facilitates breastfeeding, creates connections.

Offer baby the breast when they show signs of readiness, like rooting around your breast or suckling on their hands. Baby remains awake for 2 to 4 hours after birth, at which time Mom and baby can practice breastfeeding-don't worry if baby is not interested in latching immediately, some are sleepy, and are busy recovering from birth.

A note about healing after birth:

First suggestion- slow down! Giving birth to a tiny human takes a lot of energy, and you're open in every sense of the word- your body, your mind, your heart. Your hormones go through a significant shift in a very short amount of time; your organs are slowly finding their place again; you now have a little one to care for; and, you may be exploring breastfeeding. That's a lot happening all at once.

Be gentle with yourselves during this time, a time of incredible learning and discovery. And, try not to do too much too soon.

Use your bleeding as a gauge- as your uterus continues to contract after birth (so it can return to its pre-pregnancy size), you will lose some blood. This will taper off over the next couple of weeks. But, if you see that you're bleeding more heavily, you may have done too much. Slow down.

Also, during this healing time, some women prefer warmth to the perineum, in the way of sitz baths or warm compresses. Others prefer cold. There are several recipes online for perineal "padsicles". A bag of frozen peas can also work well!

We wish you a most wonderful birth and exquisite Babymoon!

*If you have additional questions or concerns about your upcoming birth or postpartum experience, the doulas at **MOTHERWIT DOULA CARE** (located in Montreal and Ottawa) are currently offering online consultations, as well as virtual doula support, online childbirth education classes, and infant sleep workshops. We know this is an uncertain time and our greatest wish is to offer you a sense of calm as you prepare for your little one's arrival.*

If you'd like to connect with us, please write to info@motherwit.ca. Or visit us at <https://motherwit.ca/>

RESOURCES

IN QUEBEC:

From Tiny Tot to Toddler PDF Version: <https://www.inspq.qc.ca/en/tiny-tot/pdf-version>

Quebec's pamphlet, "**Women's Rights: Pregnancy and Delivery**":
<http://www.aspq.org/uploads/pdf/4f3ab375b53c3women-rights.pdf>

FREE Breastfeeding Support (NOURRISOURCE- French website only): <https://nourrisourcemontreal.org/fr/trouver-une-marraine-allaitement/>

Infant Sleep Workshops: <https://motherwit.ca/montreal-infant-sleep-support>

IN ONTARIO:

Giving Birth in Ottawa: <https://www.themothersprogram.ca/resources-and-information/for-your-region/eastern-ontario/ottawa>

Prenatal Education: <https://www.ontarioprenataleducation.ca/>

Breastfeeding Support: <http://www.ottawabreastfeeds.ca/>

Infant Sleep Workshops: <https://ottawa.motherwit.ca/ottawa-infant-sleep-support>

GENERAL:

LABOUR SUPPORT:

Birth Mantras (or, Things to Remember During Labour): <https://www.birthful.com/podcast-birth-mantras-part-1/>

Positions for Labour: <https://www.thebump.com/a/birthing-positions>

BREASTFEEDING:

Breastfeeding your Newborn- What to Expect in the Early Weeks: <https://kellymom.com/hot-topics/newborn-nursing/>

Attaching your Baby at the Breast: <https://globalhealthmedia.org/portfolio-items/attaching-your-baby-at-the-breast/>

POSTPARTUM HEALING:

<https://experiencelife.com/article/postpartum-hormones/>

<https://www.magamama.com/articles>

INFANT SLEEP:

<https://www.birthful.com/podcastnewbornsleep/>