

Ideas For a Straightforward Birth



Dear Mum-to-be,

Many congratulations and welcome to this resource pack, which we have specially designed to meet the particular needs of mothers who are expecting their first baby. However, it is still a very useful guide for women pregnant for the second or third time (or more!).

At Neighbourhood Midwives we acknowledge that this time in your life, pregnancy, birth and early motherhood, as like any other, may present its particular challenges. We want to help bring these to your awareness and to give you some practical advice so that you can meet these challenges proactively and positively, increase your sense of well-being and fulfilment and optimise your chances for a natural, straightforward pregnancy and childbirth.

Have a think about the following topics, which mums like you have brought to our attention as being important and maybe you would like to jot down anything that you feel might be particularly challenging for you so that you can discuss them with your midwife?

1. Nutrition

Most of us think we are eating healthily (plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables and not too many sweets or ready-meals) but we may be unaware that the foods we routinely eat can be deficient in important micronutrients (even the fresh produce) or that other foods (typical culprits can be tea, coffee, wheat, gluten and dairy) can lead to malabsorption of other foods. As we get older, there is more potential for nutrient deficiencies so it is good to address your diet if you are to keep your body functioning at its best during pregnancy, birth and breastfeeding.

A well balanced diet ensures excellent nutrition during pregnancy so that you grow an appropriately sized baby. The diet below is based on a well-balanced, low GI diet and is appropriate for all pregnant women (and everyone in fact!)

General Rule: Cook from basic fresh foods; avoid ready meals and processed foods

- **Plenty of protein** – meat, dairy, beans, pulses - 5 helpings daily if you are a meat eater, 7 if vegetarian and 9 if vegan, aiming for approx. 80g protein daily (eggs are a great way to increase your protein intake for non vegans) e.g eggs for breakfast, yogurt mid morning, chicken for lunch, nuts for mid afternoon snack, fish for dinner and cheese or milk (almond or cows) for a snack.
- **Complex Carbohydrates** – beans, pulses and high fibre whole grain foods (wholemeal bread, brown rice and pasta etc.) – try to eat complex carbohydrates with a protein rather than on their own, only 1 portion of wholemeal bread each

day (2 slices). **Reduce** or eliminate simple carbohydrates e.g. white bread, rice, pasta as these cause peaks in blood sugar and therefore can increase insulin requirements.

- **Plenty of Vitamin B** (from whole grains, meat, nuts etc.)
- **Plenty of Vitamin C** (from fresh fruit and veg)
- **Plenty of water to drink (1.5-2 litres per day)**
- **Salt to taste** (a good sea or mineral salt is best)
- Try to avoid 'empty calories' i.e. **white bread, cakes, biscuits, crisps, fizzy drinks** etc.
- **Eat a moderate amount of fat.**
- There is some interesting [research](#) that links eating **50-70g of dates per day (3-7 pieces of fruit) with better outcomes at birth**

2. Physical fitness

The physiological changes that occur during pregnancy and birth aim to get your body performing at its peak; rather like an athlete's. So whatever your pre-pregnancy life-style and exercise routine, it is really important to actively build and maintain physical fitness and stamina during pregnancy.

Being active prepares your body for the physical work of labour helps to settle the baby in a good position for labour.

- Exercise 3-4 times a week -you are more likely to maintain this if it is something you enjoy and fits easily into your lifestyle (or already do) e.g. yoga, pilates, swimming, aquanatal, walking, cycling, dancing, the gym (if you are using a gym or going to classes tell you instructor that you are pregnant - they can adjust the session accordingly for you).
- It does not need to be strenuous – just keep active, it is important to reduce the amount of time you are inactive and/or spend sitting at a desk or on a sofa!
- If you do have a sedentary job, set your phone to remind you to stand, walk and rotate your hips every 45 minutes.
- Try to incorporate exercise into your every day life, e.g. get off the bus/ tube a stop early and walk the last part of your journey, use stairs rather than the lift.

- Follow [Spinning Babies Regime](#) during pregnancy to help to get your baby in a good position for labour (we recommend that you don't use the belt, through experience we find it can make the abdomen tight)
- See an osteopath, preferably one who specialises in pregnancy/pelvic work
- Some women have found [The Pink Kit](#) very helpful, it combines physical and mind preparation in one package and is available as a digital download.
- Generally try to have an active lifestyle, avoid too much 'head' and concentrate more on the physical!
- Seriously consider finishing work before 36 weeks to allow your body and mind to prepare for the birth and your new life.

3. Stress and mental-emotional balance

Typically for many women in the UK, their twenties are characterised by a higher degree of freedom, spontaneity and flexibility, while in their thirties and beyond they tend to assume more serious, responsible roles both in their careers and private lives. The latter can be very helpful when raising a family but (depending on personal circumstances and character) can also be associated with heightened stress levels. If you are prone to this you may find that you have a marked preference for rational analytical thinking as opposed to instinctive creative thought. Pregnancy and labour physiology are driven by primal brain functions that are very sensitive to inhibition through stress (our old fight-or flight mechanism!) or too much activity in our neocortex (home of rational thought processes). Thus, childbirth requires us to actively reclaim and reintegrate our spontaneity, creativity, flexibility and natural optimism!

Some women find art or making things helpful.

The importance of staying 'in the moment' during labour is crucial to managing intense contractions over many hours. It is really helpful to practice some of the popular techniques now freely available during pregnancy so that it has become second nature by the time you go into labour.

- Hypnobirthing
- Mindfulness e.g. [Mindfulness for Pregnancy App:](https://itunes.apple.com/gb/app/mindfulness-for-pregnancy/id504778562?mt=8)
<https://itunes.apple.com/gb/app/mindfulness-for-pregnancy/id504778562?mt=8>
- Breathing / relaxation –you will learn and practice these at antenatal classes but there are many on line e.g. [Video:](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=naf-3oih55c)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=naf-3oih55c>
- Sophrology is a blend of Eastern and Western philosophies and practices, it draws on various relaxation techniques to bring harmony to the mind and body. It has been popular in France and Switzerland for 50 years and women in those countries routinely use it prior to and during labour e.g. [Besophro:](http://www.be-sophro.co.uk/how-can-besophro-help/how-can-besophro-help-birth-preparation/)
<http://www.be-sophro.co.uk/how-can-besophro-help/how-can-besophro-help-birth-preparation/>
- Talk to your midwife about any anxieties that you have concerning labour and birth

- Affirmations -choose some positive statements about your pregnancy and birth that would be useful for you to see and say on a regular basis. Post them around the house or have them pop up on your phone. [e.g: https://birthbuddy.wordpress.com/resources/affirmations/](https://birthbuddy.wordpress.com/resources/affirmations/) I trust my body to grow my baby, my body is capable and strong
- Visualization techniques

4. Perineal Massage

Perineal massage is a way of preparing the tissues of the perineum, the area between the vagina and the anus, for the stretching that is necessary during childbirth.

During birth, the perineal tissues need to stretch a good deal to allow your baby to pass through the birthing canal and if the tissue doesn't stretch enough then it can tear. Slight tearing during birth is quite common, but to prevent substantial tearing midwives or doctors may occasionally cut into the tissue to give the baby room, a procedure known as an episiotomy.

The aim of perineal massage is to 'train' the perineal tissues to stretch and so help to avoid both tearing and episiotomies, as well as reducing the stinging sensation you experience when the largest part of your baby's head is being born -crowning . Perineal massage is most effective if practised every day for the last six weeks of pregnancy, so from around week 34, and for between five and ten minutes at a time.

How do you do it?

You'll need a warm, comfortable environment and privacy! To massage, use a natural massage oil like sweet almond oil, coconut butter, wheatgerm or olive oil. Don't use any petroleum-based products for perineal massage. If you're doing the massage yourself you'll need a mirror, at least for the first few times while you familiarise yourself with the perineal area. A hand-held mirror will be more trouble than it's worth, a large mirror will be easiest.

1. Whoever is giving the massage should trim their thumbnails or finger nails and wash their hands and nails.
2. Sitting with your legs spread comfortably apart, massage a little oil into the outside of the perineum and on your fingers and thumbs
3. Insert your thumbs about half a thumb length into your vaginal canal, and apply pressure to the perineum, the area between the vagina and anus. If your partner is doing the massage they should use their index fingers. You should stretch the perineum until you feel a slight stinging sensation. When you feel that sensation

hold the stretch for about a minute. I recommend making sure your mouth and jaw are relaxed while you are doing the massage.

4. Circle your thumbs to massage the oil into the tissues down to the base of the vagina, gently pulling the tissues forward and back.
5. Now apply pressure against the sides of the vagina, moving thumbs in a 'u' shape up from the part of the vagina closest to the anus. Again, you should stretch enough to feel a slight stinging sensation, without inflicting pain on yourself. Gently pull the tissues of the sides of the vagina downwards in imitation of how your baby's head will pull on the tissue during birth. Do this about half-way up the sides of the vagina and don't pull, rub, stretch or put pressure on the urethra at the top.

Remember that the massage should be gentle and not abrasive or vigorous. Initially you probably won't be able to stretch the tissues very far before the stinging sensation kicks in, but the point of the massage is that with repetition you'll be able to stretch more and more.

To make sure you do the massage every day it helps if you build it into your daily routine. Some women may find that a bath before-hand helps to relax them ready for the massage, others may find the massage itself relaxing, particularly as they become more adept at it.

[Video clip: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DK2P8Ziqc6Y](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DK2P8Ziqc6Y)

And don't forget....

To make the most of perineal massage team it with your regular pelvic floor exercises to increase tone and control of your pelvic floor muscles. If you have good control of your pelvic floor muscles then consciously relax them as you perform the massage.

5. Tips for labour:

- Remain upright and active in labour – listen to your body and rest if/when you feel this is necessary
- Labour spontaneously, avoid induction of labour, ARM and augmentation if at all possible
- Avoid epidural
- Dark, small spaces tend to work best. Labour with people you know and who will support you

This programme might seem overwhelming at first, but we can't emphasize enough how important it is to commit to it and maintain it during pregnancy if you want to maximise the likelihood of a straightforward birth. Take your time to read

**through it and make a plan as to how it can work for you and fit into your life.
Always ask your midwife if you need more information or advice.**