

Preparing for Childbirth

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A relaxed and natural delivery is possible, regardless of where it takes place (whether at home or in a hospital) if you are physically and emotionally prepared. It is important to feel as comfortable as possible in the birthing environment since being relaxed reduces the perception of pain.

A woman may choose to have a home birth where the familiar ambiance will make her feel more relaxed. It is also possible to have a natural delivery in a hospital by making special arrangements with a midwife to assist in the birthing process and in order to avoid unnecessary medical intervention. Water births are also popular, and one may choose to give birth in water for spiritual or physical reasons. The buoyancy of water reduces pressure and relaxes muscles, reducing the risk of perineal tears.

Wherever you choose to give birth, make sure you have a cooperative and supportive birthing team, which can include your partner, an obstetrician/gynecologist, midwife, naturopathic doctor, and a doula (a birthing and postpartum support person).

A naturopathic physician integrates natural modalities to optimize overall health and prepare one for a healthy childbirth. Nutritional and lifestyle recommendations include a balanced diet including plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables (especially green vegetables), complex carbohydrates, proteins, and fibre.

Mind/body activities such as meditation, guided imagery, massage with aromatherapy, and breathing exercises can assist in relaxation. Acupuncture is a safe and effective complementary treatment for relaxation and reducing pharmacological intervention.

Regardless of where childbirth takes place, an informed approach with respect to natural interventions will make a woman feel more confident about the experience.

Botanicals Have Been Traditionally Used to Safely Enhance the Childbirth Process.

- Prenatal tea (red raspberry, alfalfa, nettle in equal quantities) provides a rich source of minerals that improve contractions and reduce constipation.
- Evening primrose oil used orally and vaginally increases prostaglandin levels and readies the cervix for labour.
- Blue cohosh, black cohosh*, and partridgeberry (*Mitchella repens*) strengthen uterine muscles.
- Scullcap aids relaxation in the early stages of labour.

(*Health Canada has issued a warning about the potential for liver damage with use of black cohosh. For more comprehensive information, please refer to hc-sc.gc.ca/ahc-asc/media/advories-avis/2006/2006_72_e.html.)

The Following Nutrients are Used to Optimize the Health of the Birthing Mother.

- Omega-3 essential fatty acids may reduce pain and inflammation.
- Vitamin E mixed tocopherols improve tissue elasticity.
- Vitamin C offers collagen support, preventing premature rupture of membranes at term.
- Calcium and magnesium supplements help relax muscles.

Homeopathy is based on the principle that like cures like and has a long history of use originating in Germany. Specific remedies are indicated depending on individual cases.

- *Natrum muriaticum* or *Medorrhinum*: used for breech births
- *Aconite*: for a fast labour with strong pains and feeling of panic
- *Arnica*: helps muscles function properly
- *Caulophyllum*: when labour is not progressing, cervix is slow to dilate, pains are strong but ineffective and move about, or if the woman feels cold
- *Pulsatilla*: irregular and weak contractions, the cervix is slow to dilate, the birthing mother is feeling clingy and tearful or is wanting to give up

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