

# QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR CAREGIVER

If you ask parents how they chose their obstetrician or caregiver, most of them will say it's because someone they know suggested or recommended them.

However, you need to think about the birth YOU want; because every single person in that room when you bring your baby earthside, should be there with one single focus - to support YOU.

Your caregiver (obstetrician/doctor/midwife/other) needs to be the right fit for you and your family, and your unique circumstances.

To help you make this important decision, I've put together a list of questions to ask at your first (or next) appointment - make sure to book extra time so that you can get through all the questions you want to ask, and discuss anything further should you wish to.

## WHAT ARE YOUR BELIEFS AND PHILOSOPHIES ABOUT BIRTH?

Do they believe that birth is a natural physiological process of the body that, outside of occasional special circumstances, doesn't require medical assistance? Or do they believe that birth is medical - that it's risky and requires medical management and assistance?

If your beliefs/philosophies don't match, consider how this difference might impact your pregnancy/labour/birth. Your relationship with your caregiver is important!

## WHAT DO YOU THINK OF BIRTH PLANS/PREFERENCES? WILL YOU HONOUR MY PREFERENCES?

Do they respect and value the time and consideration you've put into thinking about what you want for your birth? We know we can't control everything when it comes to birth, we also know that there is great power in creating a birth plan/preferences because it allows us to look at all our options and think about different circumstances and what we might want in any given situation. Will your caregivers work with you and your preferences? Will they have an open, honest discussion with you should special circumstances arise that may require an adjustment to your birth plan/preferences?

## HOW MUCH CHOICE DO YOU BELIEVE I SHOULD HAVE IN MY PREGNANCY AND BIRTH?

Do they believe that they are the expert and that you should fall in line and do whatever they say? Do they believe that you get choice, that you are the expert on you? Which seat do you want to be in, the drivers seat or a passenger along for the ride?

### WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ON ME DECLINING CERTAIN TESTS/PROCEDURES?

Does your caregiver respect your right to decline any test/procedure you do not wish to undertake - even if they do not agree with your decision? Even if they disagree with your decision, you want a caregiver who will respect that decision, and continue to provide you with the best care possible.

### WHAT IS YOUR SPONTANEOUS NORMAL VAGINAL BIRTH RATE?

This will give you a great indicator as to whether what they say their beliefs/philosophies are about birth, are reflected in their outcomes. (Baring in mind that some obstetricians specialise in high-risk pregnancies, which may affect their rates).

### WHAT ARE YOUR INDUCTION/INSTRUMENTAL DELIVERY/EPISIOTOMY RATES?

Are inductions routine? Or only performed with medical necessity where the benefits outweigh the risks and all options have been fully discussed? Inductions can and do save lives, however inductions that aren't medically indicated can be the start of a cascade of unnecessary interventions. Understanding the benefits/risks and all the options for your particular circumstances will help you make an informed decision.

### WHAT ARE YOUR CAESAREAN RATES? WHAT FAMILY FRIENDLY CAESAREAN OPTIONS DO YOU ACCOMMODATE?

Like inductions, caesareans can be medically indicated and life-saving. The recommendation from the World Health Organisation is a 10-15% caesarean rate, so it's worth asking the question and comparing.

Sometimes it becomes clear that a caesarean is necessary. If you make that decision, there are ways to make it a more comfortable, family-friendly experience. Things such as: having your chosen support people with you, a calm environment (your chosen music, no unnecessary lighting or noise), maternal assisted caesarean (where you lift your baby out), optimal cord clamping, immediate skin to skin and breastfeeding, anything else you may wish for your birth.

### WHAT IF MY BABY IS BREECH? WILL YOU SUPPORT ME TO HAVE A VAGINAL BREECH BIRTH?

A breech baby is a variation of normal not an automatic reason for a caesarean birth. Unfortunately not every caregiver is trained in vaginal breech birth. In fact the skills are being lost as so few practitioners are acquiring these skills; opting instead for caesarean births.

### WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ON MONITORING DURING LABOUR?

Do you want to be have freedom of movement during labour/birth? Certain types of monitoring make active labouring in your position of choice more difficult. The evidence has not shown improved outcomes for mother or baby with continuous monitoring (CTG) compared to intermittent monitoring.

### WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ON OPTIMAL CORD CLAMPING?

What a caregiver usually does as their standard practice might vary from what you are wanting for your birth. Some still believe in clamping and cutting the cord straight away, others have a particular time frame they're happy to wait (Eg. 60sec/2min), and ideally, some will wait until the cord has stopped pulsating and turned white.

### WHAT POSITION DO THE PARENTS YOU SUPPORT GIVE BIRTH IN? WILL YOU SUPPORT ME TO BIRTH IN THE POSITION I'M MOST COMFORTABLE IN?

This question is really important as we know that being able to actively labour and birth in whatever position feels right to you, allows you to work with your body (and gravity!) rather than against it, allowing the pelvis to open up effectively and making labour and birth more comfortable for you.

### WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ON DELIVERY OF THE PLACENTA? DO YOU SUPPORT A PHYSIOLOGICAL THIRD STAGE IF LABOUR AND BIRTH HAS BEEN INTERVENTION-FREE?

Look into your options and know what your preferences are for the birth of your placenta. If your caregivers preferences don't align with yours, will they support you?

### DO YOU HAVE ANY HOLIDAYS PLANNED DURING MY PREGNANCY/ESTIMATED DUE MONTH?

If they already have holidays planned, you probably want to consider the timing and how that might impact your pregnancy/birth. There is the possibility of pressure for an induction to ensure that your caregiver is in attendance for your birth.

### WHO COVERS FOR YOU IF YOU ARE UNABLE TO ATTEND? CAN I MEET THEM?

As much as we like to think that the caregiver we've chosen is always going to be available and in attendance at our birth or should we need them for something, they can't be available every second of every day. So it's good to know who will be covering, should your chosen caregiver be unavailable for some reason. Make a time to meet them and to ask all the questions that are important to you. They may have different thoughts/perspectives than the one you've chosen.

It can be daunting having these conversations.

Remember, you and your baby deserve someone who will be in your corner every step of the way, not someone you have to fight against.

It's an experience that will change you forever.

You don't get to do it over.

You deserve a positive birth.