

Birth Doula FAQs

1. What is a birth doula?

A birth doula is a person trained and experienced in childbirth who provides continuous physical, emotional and informational support to the mother before, during and just after childbirth.

2. Where does the word “doula” come from?

The word “doula” comes from ancient Greek, meaning “Woman’s servant.” Throughout history and in much of the world today, a cadre of women support a woman through labour and birth, giving back rubs and providing continuous emotional support. Like their historical counterparts, current birth doulas know how to help a woman in labour feel better. However, today’s doulas are much more diverse than their predecessors.

3. What effects does the presence of a doula have on birth outcomes?

Numerous clinical studies have found that a doula’s presence at birth:

- tends to result in shorter labours with fewer complications
- reduces negative feelings about one’s childbirth experience
- reduces the need for cintocin (a labour-inducing drug), forceps or vacuum extraction
- reduces the requests for pain medication and epidurals, as well as the incidence of caesareans

4. What effects does the presence of a doula have on the mother?

When a doula is present during and after childbirth, women report greater satisfaction with their birth experience, make more positive assessments of their babies, have fewer caesareans and requests for medical intervention, and less postpartum depression.

5. What effects do the presence of doulas have on babies?

Studies have shown that babies born with doulas present tend to have shorter hospital stays with fewer admissions to special care nurseries, breastfeed more easily and have more affectionate mothers in the postpartum period.

6. How can I find a doula in my area?

There are number of websites that list doula’s by their locations.

7. How do doulas practice?

Doulas practice in three ways: privately hired directly by clients, as hospital employees, and as volunteers in community or hospital programs.

8. Does a doula replace nursing staff?

No. Doulas do not replace nurses or other medical staff. Doulas do not perform clinical or medical tasks such as taking blood pressure or temperature, monitoring foetal heart rate, doing vaginal examinations or providing postpartum clinical care. They are there to comfort and support the mother and to enhance communication between the mother and medical professionals.

9. Does a doula make decisions on my behalf?

A doula does not make decisions for clients or intervene in their clinical care. She provides informational and emotional support, while respecting a woman’s decisions.

10. Will a doula make my partner feel unnecessary?

No, a doula is supportive to both the mother and her partner, and plays a crucial role in helping a partner become involved in the birth to the extent he/she feels comfortable.

