

SO YOU ARE PREGNANT!

Preparing for the birth

So you are having a baby! Fantastic, or maybe it's been a bit of a surprise? Having a baby is the most wonderful thing, but also a huge responsibility. You are going to need support, so if possible try to involve your partner, your family and friends.

It is important to see a midwife as soon as possible – many women think they have to see a doctor, and it is fine to see your doctor if you wish, but you can just go straight to the midwife. Your local midwife will usually be found in the local doctor's surgery, but sometimes also at Children's Centres, you will usually be seen less often at the beginning and then more frequently as the pregnancy progresses. Don't feel that any question is daft - it isn't a daft question if you don't know the answer! Mums and friends can be great and really supportive, but they may not always have the correct information, and you can ask anything in complete confidence. A midwife is expert in pregnancy and birth and will help you throughout the pregnancy, birth and early days of parenting. She will also help you make decisions and support you in your wishes.

During the pregnancy it may be suggested that you take supplements and you will also be offered various tests and you will be asked to see the midwife regularly so that she can make sure that both you and the baby are well; use the appointments to ask any questions you may have. You should also be offered some antenatal or parentcraft classes which can be variable in quality, so consider NCT (the National Childbirth Trust) or active birth classes as well, they can be an opportunity to make friends with other expectant mums – often the friends made in these groups stay friends for years to come with the babies growing up together – it can be very supportive to be able to ask a friend “is this normal?”, “did your baby do this?”

It is really worth reading all you can about birth and babies. Your midwife will give you lots of information, but you can also go to the local library and borrow books. There are also sometimes local discussion groups, for example at Surestart Children's Centres, NCT and Meet a Mum (MAMA), La Leche League and Association of Breastfeeding Mothers (ABM) both breastfeeding support groups may also have meetings to which pregnant women are invited – you midwife may know what is available locally or ask in the library.

There is actually quite a bit that you can do to prepare for the birth – you probably are young, fit and healthy and that is great. Giving birth is a bit like running a marathon – it is one of the hardest day's work you will ever do, so if you are relatively fit that helps (I don't mean that you should be exercising hard, but gentle exercise like walking and swimming is good). There may also be pregnancy yoga or aquanatal sessions in your area and both will be helpful to you. If you already exercise there is probably no reason why you shouldn't continue, but don't overdo it and ask your midwife for advice. Other strategies include learning self-hypnosis or 'hypnobirthing' techniques and seeing

complementary therapists such as acupuncturists, homoeopaths, reflexologists, chiropractors etc throughout the pregnancy.

As you get heavier it is hard to want to do too much and tempting to sit on the sofa, but this actually is the worst thing you can do. Instead sit on a dining chair, but sit on it backwards, with your legs open and facing the chair back – this is great because it keeps you in a nice upright position, opens your pelvis and tips the baby forward. If you slouch backwards onto the sofa it tends to tip the baby towards your back and this can make labour longer and more difficult. If you have access to an exercise or birthing ball these too are great to sit on for the same reason – you can sit on a chair or ball and watch TV or even read a book!

Some women prepare for the birth by gently massaging their perineum (this is the area of skin between the vagina and the anus). If this is something that you think you might be able to do ask your midwife for more information about how to do this.

You also need to start considering where you want to give birth. Depending upon where you live you may have several options: at home, in a birthing unit or in a hospital – again this is something to discuss with your midwife.

The Antenatal Classes or Parentcraft Classes are usually run over a period of time, and you should be able to take along your partner or your Mum or a friend if you wish. The classes should give you lots of information about what to expect when you go into labour, they will tell you when you should call your midwife or hospital – bearing in mind that labour is usually a LONG process and women expecting their first baby nearly always contact the midwife before they really need to! The class may well also organise a visit to your local maternity unit so that everything can be explained to you – it is far less scary if you know what the place looks like and what machines are used for! Sometimes a Mum will come along with her baby and a feeding or bathing demonstration may be given. The midwife will also talk about how you can help yourself during the birth - I would really encourage you to go along!

Written by Valerie Gommon, BA (Hons), RM, Independent Midwife
www.3shiresmidwife.co.uk