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How to create a birth plan

You find out you're pregnant and by the time you've navigated the nausea and strange new feelings, you're in your third trimester. When you're feeling unwell with morning sickness, time seems to drag – but before you know it, you're having to think about where to give birth, what will happen and what you need to prepare for your baby's arrival.

What is a birth plan?

A birth plan is a way for you to communicate what kind of [labour](#) and birth you would like, as well as what you would like to happen after [childbirth](#). Creating a birth plan isn't essential, but it can help you think about what you want, what you are comfortable with and what you would like to avoid. This can make you feel more confident and ensure the healthcare staff looking after you know your feelings and preferences.

Your midwife can help you form your birth plan depending on your priorities, your medical history, your circumstances and what is available at your [maternity](#) service. It's also important to discuss your plan with your [birth partner](#), so they can advocate for you while you are in labour.

Of course, you can change your plan at any time – so if you decide you want a different kind of pain relief than you originally thought, that is fine. [Research](#) has shown that being flexible is key when forming a [birth](#) plan, to avoid feelings of disappointment or failure if things change during labour. For example, if an unplanned [caesarean](#) is necessary. This can contribute to how you retrospectively feel about the birth experience and whether it was positive or not.

How to create a birth plan and what to include

In general, birth plans include information on who you want as your [birth partner](#), where you want to give birth, positions you would like to try and the type of pain relief you would prefer. It can also include how many people you are happy with in your birth environment, whether you want dim lighting and the facilities you would like, such as a birthing pool.

Your birth plan can include information for after the birth too, such as whether you would like skin-to-skin time or how you would like to [feed](#). You can also include any religious customs that you would like to be observed too.

Delivering the placenta

A birth plan can also include how you would like to deliver the placenta after birth. Delivering the placenta is the 'third' stage of labour and can be actively managed to speed things up and reduce the risk of heavy bleeding.

During an actively managed third stage, you'll have an injection to reduce the size of your womb, your midwife will clamp and cut the umbilical cord and you'll deliver the placenta with or without the help of your midwife.

Delayed cord clamping

You can also outline whether you want delayed cord clamping. This entails the midwife waiting at least one minute before cutting the umbilical cord after the baby is born to improve their [health](#).

Mental health care

If you are receiving specialist care – for example, via a perinatal [mental health](#) service – your healthcare provider will be able to help you form a plan specific to your needs. This could include, for example, signs that you may be struggling with your [mental health](#) after birth, or any support you may want.

Vitamin K

After your baby is born, you will be offered an injection of vitamin K for your baby. This helps prevent a rare disorder called vitamin K deficiency bleeding. If you would prefer for your baby not to have an injection, they can have vitamin K by mouth but they will need further doses. You can include this preference in your birth plan.

What to include in a caesarean birth plan

If you have planned to have a [C-section](#), there are other elements you can include in your birth plan. You can ask your midwife whether photos can be taken, whether you want a screen or not and if you want skin-to-skin contact with your baby in theatre.

When to create a birth plan

You can form a birth plan at any point during your pregnancy, but it is usually done in the third trimester when you're likely to be thinking more about the upcoming birth. You can note down your preferences or ideas over time, as you may think of new things you would like to include throughout your pregnancy.

Why it's important to be flexible with your birth plan

It's normal to feel [anxious](#) or nervous about the lack of control over childbirth, and creating a birth plan can help you feel more assured. However, it's important to be flexible because things don't always go to plan during pregnancy or labour. Facilities may not be available on the day, you may need an unplanned [C-section](#) or you may change your mind about what you want.

If you need to make any decisions, you should be well informed about your choices. The maternity staff should ensure you clearly understand all your options and include your birth partner in any decisions to be made. Even if your situation changes, you can still retain control and have a [positive birth experience](#).

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