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## What do you learn in antenatal classes and what are the benefits?

Becoming a parent can be a very overwhelming experience and looking after a newborn is often a steep learning curve. Antenatal classes can be a great way for new parents to prepare for the arrival of their baby, but what exactly do these classes cover, and what are the benefits of antenatal classes?

### What are antenatal classes?

"Antenatal courses are for groups of expectant parents who usually attend during their third trimester," says Val Willcox, practice manager at the [National Childbirth Trust](#) (NCT). The third trimester begins around week 28 of [pregnancy](#) and lasts until you give birth, which is often around week 40 of pregnancy.

"Where possible, the parents attending live in the same area and will be expecting their baby or babies at a similar time," Willcox says. "The content of our NCT courses is built around five key themes – planning for a positive [birth](#) experience, understanding and caring for your baby, [feeding](#) your baby, taking care of physical and [mental health](#), and family relationships and support networks."

Antenatal courses are usually split into several classes over a period of weeks or over the course of one month. Antenatal classes are usually held once a week and last a couple of hours. However, there may be extra classes to cover subjects with lots of information, such as feeding. Usually, both parents can attend antenatal classes and partners are encouraged to join. Some areas may offer classes for single parents or classes in different languages.

## Informed decisions

Often, antenatal classes cover what happens in [labour](#) and delivery, and the different interventions that can be used. This helps [pregnant people](#) feel prepared and ensure they are able to make informed decisions. Antenatal classes may also include how to make a [birth plan](#), techniques to cope with labour, and information on pain relief. Parents-to-be will also be able to ask the class leader questions, talk about their plans and air any worries they may have.

"The benefits of NCT antenatal courses are that parents will be empowered to make decisions about how they want to approach birth and the early [parenting](#) period," says Willcox. "Expectant parents can learn more about what is involved and the evidence behind different approaches."

## Making friends

Antenatal classes are also a good way to meet other expectant parents. Caring for a newborn baby can be a scary and [isolating](#) time, particularly for first-time parents. Friends made at antenatal classes can meet up and support each other through the first few months after birth. Whether it's going for a coffee or heading for a much needed glass of wine, antenatal classes allow new parents to make lifelong friends and build strong [support networks](#).

## Boosting confidence and easing anxiety

It's normal for new parents to feel anxious and nervous about the road ahead. However, [research](#) shows antenatal education can help to reduce fears surrounding birth, and lower feelings of [stress](#) and [anxiety](#) in pregnant women.

"We believe that sharing evidence-based information and providing opportunities for expectant parents to explore their options helps them feel [more confident about labour](#), birth and early parenting," says Willcox. "It also gives them a chance to discuss how they feel with peers and to practise new skills."

A separate [study](#) found women who attended classes were more satisfied with the experience of childbirth and were less likely to have an over-medicalised birth. [Studies](#) also show [partners](#) benefit from attending antenatal classes, with fathers reporting feeling more prepared for birth and better able to fulfil their supportive roles.

## How can I find antenatal classes near me?

You can search for antenatal classes near you online or on [social media](#). Often, groups are held at community centres, local halls and churches. You can search for local NCT groups via its [website](#). Your midwife, health visitor or doctor may also be able to point you towards a local antenatal group. NHS classes are free, but NCT classes can charge a fee.

Antenatal classes are often oversubscribed and can get booked up quickly, so it's a good idea to book your place in advance. If you aren't able to attend classes in person, classes are frequently held online via Zoom or Microsoft Teams. [BabyCentre](#) also runs free online antenatal classes via pre-recorded videos, so you can learn about labour and [birth](#) in your own time.

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