



Normal Vaginal Birth

When your labour begins spontaneously between 37 and 42 weeks of pregnancy, it's a clear signal that your baby is now ready to be born. It also means that after nine months, your body has prepared itself to begin the process of labour and birth.

Your baby will be in the head-down position, ready to start the journey. Your contractions will increase in frequency and intensity as your cervix thins and opens (dilates). Once your cervix is fully open, you will push your baby out through your vaginal canal. The hormones your body releases during labour, along with the squeezing of your newborn's lungs during the birth process, will help your baby draw that first breath of air.

A woman's body is built for childbirth, and most women are able to successfully give birth vaginally. In most cases, normal vaginal birth is the safest and best option for both you and your baby.

A normal vaginal birth relies on your body's own natural ability to labour and successfully deliver your baby. As your labour progresses and your cervix opens, the support you receive from your partner or family members, as well as from your care givers, can help avoid complications that can ultimately lead to a cesarean birth. The World Health Organization states: "In normal birth there should be a valid reason to interfere with the natural process."

A number of different methods of pain management are available to you during normal vaginal birth. These can include comfort measures such as massage or water immersion, or medication such as narcotic or epidural pain relief.

With a vaginal birth, you can expect to stay in hospital anywhere from several hours up to two days after the birth of your baby.

Benefits of Vaginal Birth

In most cases, normal vaginal childbirth is the safest and best option for mother and baby. Compared to a cesarean birth, vaginal birth offers:

- Less blood loss
- Less risk of injury and infection
- No complications associated with surgery
- A shorter hospital stay
- A faster, less painful post birth recovery
- Less risk of breathing difficulties for your baby

Risks of Vaginal Birth

After a normal vaginal birth, your recovery should be rapid. You may experience:

- Stitches in your vagina and perineum (the skin between the vagina and anus)
- Short-term urinary incontinence (leaking urine), which often resolves quickly
- Short-term sexual problems after the birth of your baby, such as painful intercourse or decreased desire for sex. This is quite common following any type of birth.

Your Best Chance to Deliver Vaginally

Research has shown that the approaches and methods used by care providers and hospitals can affect how your labour and birth progresses. In general, the more your care providers can support your needs, minimize unnecessary interventions, and allow your labour to progress normally, the more likely you are to give birth vaginally.

You can increase your chances of having a normal vaginal birth, and a healthier newborn, in the following ways:

- Your labour is not induced unless there is a medical reason to do so;
- You are free to move around as much as you like during your labour (i.e. you're not confined to a bed). For example, you may feel like standing, walking, swaying back and forth, leaning forward, or kneeling on your hand and knees.
- You receive continuous one-on-one support throughout your labour. This may be provided by a supportive partner, family member or friend, or by a trained birthing coach or doula;
- You are not given interventions without a medical reason,
- You are permitted to eat and drink;
- During the birth, you are free to push in the position that feels best to you, especially positions where gravity can help (e.g. standing, kneeling, squatting);

Talk to your maternity care provider about using these approaches during your labour and birth.

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