

Birth Preparation Guide

DOULA AT THE GATE • Getting body, mind, and home ready to meet your baby

Preparation isn't about controlling birth — it's about walking into it informed, supported, and confident in your choices. Use this guide through your third trimester to get your team, your plan, and your home ready, and to learn what labor will actually feel like when it begins.

Your Third-Trimester Timeline

Weeks 28–32: Take a childbirth class. Choose your pediatrician. Start sleeping on your side and counting kicks daily. Interview and book your doula if you haven't already.

Weeks 32–34: Tour your hospital or birth center. Draft your birth preferences and review them with your provider. Install the car seat.

Weeks 34–36: Pack your hospital bag. Pre-register at the hospital. Wash baby clothes and set up a sleep space. Build your freezer meal stash.

Weeks 36–38: Finalize who's on call for older kids and pets. Confirm your doula's on-call window. Practice comfort techniques together weekly.

Weeks 38–40+: Rest, hydrate, and keep moving gently. Keep the gas tank full and your phone charged. Your only job now is patience.

Build Your Birth Team

Write in your people and post this where your support person can find it.

Provider (OB/midwife) & after-hours line: _____

Birth location & main number: _____

Doula & on-call number: _____

Pediatrician: _____

On call for kids/pets: _____

First calls after baby arrives: _____

Birth Preferences Worksheet

There's no perfect birth plan — there are informed preferences plus flexibility. Talk through each of these with your provider, then keep your written version to one page. Topics to decide on:

- ☐ Environment: lighting, music, who's in the room, photos or video
- ☐ Movement and positions: freedom to walk, shower or tub, birth ball, positions for pushing
- ☐ Pain relief preferences: unmedicated comfort measures, nitrous, epidural — and when you'd like options offered
- ☐ Monitoring: intermittent vs. continuous, saline lock vs. running IV
- ☐ Interventions: your preferences around induction, augmentation, and assisted delivery — and the questions you want asked first
- ☐ If a cesarean becomes needed: support person present, clear drape option, music, immediate skin-to-skin in the OR if possible
- ☐ Right after birth: delayed cord clamping, skin-to-skin, who announces or catches, cord cutting
- ☐ Newborn care: feeding plan, vitamin K, eye ointment, hep B, bath timing, rooming in

Knowing When It's Time

Early labor: Contractions that are irregular or far apart, low backache, cramping, losing the mucus plug. Rest, eat, hydrate — this part can take a while, and home is usually the most comfortable place for it.

Active labor: A common guide is 5-1-1 — contractions 5 minutes apart, lasting 1 minute, for 1 hour — but follow YOUR provider's instructions for when to call and when to come in.

Call right away if: Your water breaks (note the time, color, and amount), you're bleeding bright red, baby's movement slows, you have a severe headache or vision changes, or you're less than 37 weeks with regular contractions.

Comfort & Coping Toolkit

Practice these before labor so they're second nature when you need them:

- ☐ Slow, low breathing — in through the nose, long sigh out; keep jaw and shoulders loose
- ☐ Movement and gravity: walking, swaying, lunges on stairs, hands-and-knees, the birth ball
- ☐ Water: a long shower on your back, or the tub if available
- ☐ Counter-pressure and hip squeezes from your partner or doula (practice now!)
- ☐ Heat on the low back, cool cloth on the face and neck
- ☐ A focal point, mantra, or playlist that brings you back to center

- ☐ Change something every 30 minutes or so: position, room, temperature, sound

Final Prep Checklist

- ☐ Hospital bag packed and by the door (see our Hospital Bag Checklist)
- ☐ Car seat installed and checked by a certified technician
- ☐ Birth preferences printed — a few copies in the bag
- ☐ Pre-registration complete and insurance card in your wallet
- ☐ Route to the hospital driven once, including a parking plan
- ☐ Phone numbers posted: provider, doula, on-call helpers
- ☐ Freezer meals stocked and a postpartum recovery basket ready
- ☐ Childbirth class complete and comfort measures practiced together

AT THE GATE WITH YOU

You don't have to memorize any of this — that's what your support team is for. Prepare, then trust yourself.

This guide is for general information and does not replace medical advice from your provider.