

Empowered and Evolved Pregnancy Checklist

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

We have made pregnancy and parenting so difficult - so many books, activities and tasks you seemingly MUST do. It can be so overwhelming that we stop in our tracks.

My passion is simplifying this for you. This checklist covers all your needs for a holistically healthy, empowered, and evolved pregnancy.

--Tend to Mindset, emotional wellbeing

Mental concerns often interrupt labor or have negative physical effects. See *Exploration Exercises* and *Mindfulness Exercises* to explore and process normal fears and concerns. This will help you if you are interested in a natural labor!

--Maintain Nourishment - see *Quick, Easy, and Affordable Nourishment*

--Gently exercise - see *Fitness* - great one-stop shop for mind and body wellbeing!

--Tend to pelvic floor health - see *Pelvic Floor Health* and/or *Fitness*

--Learn and play with natural healing remedies- see *Herbal Remedies* and *Healing Touch*

--Understand and prepare for labor intensity - see *Understanding and Working with Labor Intensity*

--Learn and practice different positions

There are SO many positions and fantastic video and photo resources just a google search away. I encourage you to find and practice positions that incorporate swaying hips and other movements, reclining, sitting, squatting, dangling - from partner or other steady support, and on hands and knees and birthing ball. For pushing, early labor, and active labor.

--Build social support - see *Connection*

--Learn more about the basics

Feel confident navigating medical care and understanding basics of pregnancy and labor - see *Basics*

It's OK to feel overwhelmed

1. Baby steps: set a timer and spend 5 minutes each on your mind and body. Start with whatever makes your heart sing the most - something that feels fun, easy and intrigues you.

Example: - 5 minutes for mental - like an exploration exercise. and 5 minutes for physical - like doing yoga.

2. Work your way up: you wanna keep going past 5 minutes? - go ahead! Go for another 5 minutes with a different mind or body exercise.

Tip: Don't go too hard too fast - even if you want to do more, maybe try 5-10 minutes for a week before going up.

3. Remember: We are all here as a result of people giving birth. Your parents and upbringing probably weren't perfect, and you aren't perfect either - your parent(s) may not have done any of this stuff! You're here, OK, and maybe even doing really well. *Just do what makes your heart sing and feels good in your gut.*

4. Still overwhelmed? Please don't keep yourself in that painful state. I love offering free support - it is my passion, my jam. My heart wants your heart to feel better, no matter what, and I CAN help you get there.

Exploration Exercises

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Oftentimes, during birth, repressed issues come to the surface. This can halt labor and start the fear, tension, pain cycle. Before having a child, exploring your relationship with your childhood, parents, financial security, partner, community, society, and higher power, can result in a stronger, healthier pregnancy, birth and post partum experience.

Art helps us process what is underneath the surface. If art exploration feels uncomfortable for you, try free journaling or at least talk about it with a loved one. The goal is not for it to be pretty, but to reveal and heal.

Tips:

Watercolors are fun and flowy and might enhance expression.

Close your eyes and breathe, connect to all your senses.

Whenever you feel blocked or stuck, take one more breath and just scribble/mind dump.

Keep adding more detail - one more idea or symbol.

If you are working with me, let's explore what comes up together and empower your coping and healing!

Pick a question (or few) to explore:

- What qualities do you want to develop - embody - as a mother/father? Maybe plant, animal, or other nature forms come to mind.
- If your pregnancy was a landscape, what would it look like? What biome is it in? What season is it? What is the weather like? Is there someone with you? How are you traversing this landscape? What is behind you, with you, ahead of you on your path?
- do the same for birth and for parenting
- Parenting and birth are rites of passage, with each new turn in your journey you encounter something unexpected, a challenge. These challenges are inherently unknowable and shocking - showing up as overwhelming doubt, gratitude, anger, terror, confusion. We can describe these challenges as gates, or thresholds, we must pass in our birthing journey. What gates have you passed? What or who was behind, around and/or in front of this gate. Was there a guardian? A price for passage? A gatekeeper? A treasure that laid beyond?
- What gates do you most fear in your pregnancy, birth, and parenting experience? Explore these with the same questions as the previous exercise.
- How will you cope with facing these gates? Explore coping with each gate you imagined.
- What comes to mind when you hear C- Section? What about cesarean birth/I gave birth by cesarean/my baby was born by cesarean
- What do you as a mother look like? Get as detailed as possible symbolically
- What is your idea-image of being in labor and birth? What is it like for you?
- What is being pregnant like for you?
- What is parenting like for you?
- What is your fantasy of labor and birth? Parenting?
- What does being open - open enough for child - look like for you?
- What is it like in your womb? What is your baby doing? Feeling? Hearing? Seeing? What does your baby look like?
- What was childhood like for you? What do you think it will be like for your child?
- What were your parent(s) parenting like? How will you be a parent? What will parenting with your partner, community, this culture and society, higher power of your understanding, look like?

Mindfulness Exercises

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Mindfulness is a part of creating a holistically healthy system for your baby. Mental wellness is often overlooked but has long-lasting and deep impacts if neglected - including attachment and bonding issues, adult and perinatal mood disorders, as well as learning disabilities.

Practicing mindfulness now can help empower coping through birthing, prevent and alleviate perinatal mood disorders, and improve bonding

HOW?

Find a time where you can dedicate practice 4-5 times a week. Start with 5-10 minutes and see if you can work up to 30 minutes, or even an hour.

Get cozy! Find a comfortable quiet place with soothing lighting. Wear clothes that don't constrict or bind you, that breathe but feel warm. Take a blanket with you, and make sure your bladder is empty.

Get in a position where you can recline without laying back completely - and are comfortably supported.

Explore and find one (or a few) that work for you!

Movement - Walking, hiking, yoga, biking - with each downward movement or out breath think of something you want to release (anxiety) and with each inhale or with any upward movements think of something you'd like to bring in (strength, trust)

Journaling- set a timer for 5-10 minutes and literally don't stop writing - it can even be "I don't know what to write" or "I hate doing this" just get all those thoughts out. Create affirmations that are present tense - "I am strong." "I trust my body" take time to make them very specific and personal to your unique goals

Birth Art - see Exploration Exercises handout, but also feel free to get out any sort of art supplies and aimlessly (not for others to see or to be "pretty") doodle, paint, mold clay, collage, etc.

Pendulum meditation - find any weighted object and attach to a string, or if you are working with me, use your pendulum. Set an intention that clockwise spins bring in and counter clockwise takes away. Begin spinning the pendulum clockwise and think about one thing you'd like to bring in (unconditional love, peacefulness, health, etc.) either set a timer or set the intention that the pendulum will stop spinning when it needs to (let your body intuitively control how long you sit) and then reverse directions and do the same thing with something you'd like to put out. This can be negative or positive - ie you can release anxiety or you can send out love

Tensing and Relaxing - alternating areas of focus on your body (head, neck and shoulders, each arm, stomach, bottom, legs) practice breathing in, tensing (without straining), holding breath for a few counts, and breathing out relaxation and looseness into just the area you are focused on.

5 senses - take a breath with each sense - just seeing if you can notice everything you hear for one breath, taste, smell, see, feel, etc. Alternatively, set a timer for 1 minute and focus on one sense for that entire minute.

Exercises I can teach you - mindfulness and mental wellbeing is my passion! If we work together I'd love to teach you a few empowering and powerful techniques in person

See **pain coping techniques and exploration exercises handouts** for additional practices that will support mental wellbeing

Grow With Flo

Counseling and Doula Services

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Healthy, Easy, and Affordable Nutrition

I HIGHLY recommend Lily Nichols - unbiased, evidence based nutrition freebies: <https://lilynicholsrdn.com/freebies/>

- **Sausage and Cabbage Stir-fry** - make Vegetarian friendly or bulk it up with a fried egg - slice and cook the sausage, add to sauerkraut, kimchi (if you don't cook these, they maintain probiotic goodness). You can also cook up with cabbage or other veggies on hand.
- **Veggie Hash** - cook scrambled eggs, sausage or leftover meat, chopped veggies of your choice (ie spinach and onions) and diced sweet potato together in a skillet (I'd give those taters a quick toss in a healthy serving of melted butter and cinnamon first)
- **Wild Grain Rice and Beans** - if you wanna splurge: prep the rice in coconut milk instead of water, mix in some diced flat leafed parsley, and squeeze some fresh lemon over it. Add a fried egg for bulk if you like, and season those beans up!
- **Good Ol' Oatmeal** - Make 1/2 cup of organic old fashioned rolled oats as directed with 1/2 cup of favorite frozen or diced fresh fruit. Try adding any of the following: 1 tablespoon of nut butter, greek yogurt, chopped seeds and nuts, cinnamon, vanilla extract
- **Smoothies!** - Mix and match to your liking: 1/2 cup of plain greek yogurt, a handful of spinach or other super green mix, 1 cup of frozen or fresh fruit you like, bananas and carrots always great, cheap, and cover spinach flavor, and a little water or milk of your preference in a blender. Try adding nut butter and ground flax or chia seeds.
- **Southwestern Scramble** - 2 eggs, diced chiles of your choice, onion, shredded chicken, and avocado scrambled together - hot sauce!
- **Veggies and Hummus, Fruits and Nut Butters and Yogurt** - dips make everything better, try to get something with as little processing or added sugars/preservatives as possible.
- **Cookie Dough Cereal** - 1/2 cup organic old fashioned rolled oats, 2T nut butter, 1t organic raw honey, and a sprinkle of unsweetened cocoa powder mixed together until crumbly. Add 1/2 cup milk and enjoy.
- **Super Food Salad** - spinach, mix and match (but try to get as many colors as you can): bell peppers, tomatoes, onion, cucumber, carrots, whatever is on sale, etc. Add seeds or nuts, and blueberries (preferably) or apples, grapes/whatever is cheapest. Dress with a little extra virgin olive oil and vinegar - try balsamic or apple cider. Top with left over meat, sausage, or hardboiled eggs. Prep all your veggies and meat on the day you buy them so all you have to do is assemble the salad at mealtime.
- **Greek Salad** - chopped romaine, grilled chicken (marinated in lemon juice and olive oil) - sometimes you can get those rotisserie guys pretty cheap and just shred that up to be easy on yourself - grape tomatoes, chopped cucumber, a sprinkle of crumbled feta, olives, red onion, and homemade dressing with olive oil, lemon juice, salt, pepper, and garlic.
- **Baked Sweet Potato** - smother with butter and cinnamon or other favorite seasonings - try touch of paprika! Dice before hand if you have more time to get a nice bit of crunch on the edges.
- **Baked veggie chips** - slice up zucchini, eggplant, sweet potato, plantain, whatever you like! Season simply coconut oil, salt and peper or feel free to experiment. Bake at 425 - timing varies depending on thickness and vegetable - but check in every 10 minutes for browning on both sides. Throw in sliced mushrooms or sausage to bulk up.

MAKE IT INTERESTING!

- Season like crazy: I like using turmeric, cumin, coriander, salt and pepper, (all these can be found in a good curry seasoning mix), paprika, and cinnamon - (try a pumpkin pie spice blend to get more interesting, save money)
- Bulk recipes up with cheap options like rice, eggs, sweet potatoes and/or canned beans
- If you like rice you can stay cheap, but make healthier and tastier buying bulk with a wild grain or quinoa and prep with coconut milk, not water
- Combine anything with cauliflower rice, zoodles, sweet potato hashbrowns for healthy carb alternative
- **Grocery list** - bulk spinach, wild grain rice, eggs, sauerkraut, sweet potatoes, sausage or rotisserie chicken, canned beans, curry seasoning, pumpkin pie seasoning, olive oil, apple cider vinegar, rolled oats, frozen fruit, garlic, onion, cabbage, peppers, carrots, apples, bananas, nut butter, sunflower seeds, milk, greek yogurt, butter, cheese, hot sauce.

Fitness

WHY?

Yoga and BirthFit Functional Progression are great ways to empower a natural, holistically healthy pregnancy in one fell swoop: it supports pelvic health, better positioning of the baby, mindfulness, physical strength and tone as well as providing relief from back pain, swelling and belly weight.

These exercise were specifically selected for pregnancy safety, support, and relief

• SEATED SIDE BEND

- <https://www.spotebi.com/exercise-guide/parsva-sukhasana/>

• SUPPORTED FISH

- <https://www.huggermugger.com/blog/2016/supported-fish-pose/>

• SUPPORTED TRIANGLE

- <https://www.parents.com/getting-pregnant/pre-pregnancy-health/exercise/prenatal-yoga-extended-triangle-pose/>

• CAT-COW

- <https://www.fitpregnancy.com/exercise/prenatal-workouts/catcow-the-labor-prep-yoga-move>

• ANKLE TO KNEE

- <http://www.yogabody.com/ankle-to-knee-hip-opening-stretch/>

• PIGEON POSE

- <https://www.babymed.com/prenatal-yoga/prenatal-yoga-pigeon-pose-kapotasana>

• CHILD'S POSE

- <https://www.fitpregnancy.com/exercise/prenatal-workouts/prenatal-yoga-chilids-pose>

• SUPPORTED SQUAT

- <http://wholebeginnings.com/how-to-squat-with-purpose/>

• BUTTERFLIES

- <http://www.stylecraze.com/articles/simple-steps-to-do-butterfly-exercise-during-pregnancy/#gref>

• LEGS UP THE WALL

- <https://www.spoiledyogi.com/modify-legs-wall-pose-pregnancy-beyond/>

• PUPPY POSE

- <http://www.yogamagazine.com/puppy-pose/>

• BIRTHFIT EXERCISES - FUNCTIONAL PROGRESSION

- **Great option for more active folks** - consult with a professional to incorporate resistance and weight training
<https://birthfit.com/blog/2017/11/08/top-5-movements/>

Pelvic Floor Health

WHAT? WHY?

The pelvic floor muscles support your internal organs, maintain bladder and bowel control, play a vital role in supporting the spine and help you to enjoy sex.

A compressed pelvis can make natural birth more painful and risky. Pelvic alignment helps baby to settle into a better position.

During pregnancy and birth, the pelvic floor muscles help rotate the baby's head into the correct birth position and support the weight of your growing uterus.

A healthy pelvic floor makes birthing and recovery more efficient and comfortable as well as less risky

Sometimes the muscles and ligaments in the pelvic floor become tight as a result of trauma. Consider taking a mindful approach - as a person who has been there personally and professionally, you CAN be free from the burden of trauma, and I'd love to help you get there.

SQUEEZING IN SQUEEZING IN

- after going to the toilet
- washing your hands
- having a drink
- feeding the baby
- standing in line at checkout.
- filling up gas tank
- brushing teeth
- watching TV

ELEVATOR KEGELS

- Sit and lean slightly forward with a straight back - this is ground floor.
- Squeeze and lift the muscles as if you are trying to hold in gas - this is level 1 - Hold the squeeze as you count to 8;
- Try to elevate and hold stronger - this is level 2 - count to another 8
- relax back to floor 1 for another 8 seconds.
- return to ground floor for another 8
- relax further, imagine what going down a level would be - a gentle push as if you were trying to pee faster - be gentle and hold for another 8
- Relax and return to ground floor
- If you can't hold for 8, just hold as long as you can.
- Repeat the whole thing 3 times.
- Keep breathing while exercising. Try not to tighten your buttocks.

OTHER TIPS

- sit with hips forward and slightly above your knees - on a birth ball or cross legged can facilitate this
- get your body moving 20-30 minutes a day
- lean forward when you can - over a chair, ball, your partner, or on hands and knees
- see yoga poses sheet

PERINEAL MASSAGE

- warm the area with a warm washcloth or bath for 5-10 minutes
- lie back in a comfortable position - back supported. You may want a mirror
- with clean hands lubricated with coconut oil (or any other non irritating, pH balanced lubricant) insert your thumb into your vagina. Pushing down and away from your body in a U motion towards your anus, apply firm, gentle and slow pressure.
- After a few minutes start gently sweeping the sides of your vagina for a couple minutes
- Repeat a couple times a week

BUTT LIFT

- Lie on your back with shins perpendicular to floor, knees squarely over your heels
- focusing on squeezing your glutes, lift your bottom up until your knees, abs, and chest are aligned in a diagonal line with the floor
- slowly raise and lower your bottom - imagining one vertebra at a time - about 10 x

Herbal Remedies

CAUTION

Essential oils are a strong highly concentrated form of herbal medicine.
Never use essential oils internally.
Use of certain herbs and essential oils can be contraindicated for certain medical conditions or with particular prescription medications.
When in doubt, consult with your doctor

NOURISHED PREGNANCY TEA

A few safe herbs during pregnancy are red raspberry leaf, nettles, oatstraw, lemon balm, and rose hips - Have fun blending your own herbal tea!

My doula clients get a blend for pregnancy and post-partum support from my favorite local herbalist Kat Itz of Big Bright Circle. She would love to make you a custom blend for your pregnancy needs.

ACHES AND PAINS

- Choose 1 or try these blends and apply to temples, back of neck, or across top of forehead if you have a headache. Avoid contact with eyes - particularly peppermint and ginger, and wash hands after using.
- St. John's wort, lavender, frankincense, peppermint, roman chamomile
- ginger, black pepper, lavender, chamomile, geranium

RELAX

- diffuse a mix of lavender, frankincense, roman chamomile, ylang ylang and/or neroli
- in transition stage of labor try blend of mandarin orange, bergamot, clary sage, and lavender EOs

SWELLING

- edema: blend of cypress, lavender, lemon, geranium, and/or tangerine EOs - diluted in carrier oil of choice and massage. Add few drops into bath
- hemorrhoids - orange, geranium, and/or sandalwood, dilute and apply. OR witch hazel covered pads

STRETCHMARKS

Carrier oil of choice and EO of lavender, mandarin, neroli, patchouli and/or frankincense

HEARTBURN

Fresh ginger tea:
thinly slice 3T fresh ginger, add 2 cups water, bring to a boil over medium heat in a covered saucepan. simmer for 10 minutes, turn off heat and steep until cool enough to drink, strain and enjoy

NAUSEA

spearmint EO- diffuse or dilute and apply to behind ears or on abdomen or in labor
put on a washcloth and breathe in
ginger chews and teas

HOW TO USE

Remember what I said about EOs being strong? It's really important to dilute them for topical use. Here's how:

Dilute to 1%

(This looks like 5 drops to 25 ml, 10 to 50ml, 20 to 100ml, etc.)

... In a carrier oil that you are not allergic to - fractionated coconut, sunflower, olive oil and jojobas are a safe bet.

Use one at a time and start small, in case of allergic reaction, you'll be able to trace back to what made you reach and avoid it in the future.

Try 1t -1T total EO or EO blend in bath, 1% in a carrier oil for topical use, few drops (see diffuser manual) in a diffuser, diffused in water for room mist or applying to washcloth to smell

QUICK LIST

- Sunflower or Coconut Oil
- Lavender EO
- Frankincense EO
- R. Chamomile EO
- Geranium EO
- Spearmint EO

Healing Touch

COUNTERPRESSURE

- Using a tennis ball or the palm of your hand, apply pressure to the the Bl32 area (see below)
- Double hip squeeze- opens the pelvis while also providing pain relief - at the bottom of our waist you can feel the top of our hip bones. Place the palm of your hands between the top of the hip bone and the thigh bone and squeeze - like squeezing the top of a clothes pin.
- To keep sustainable (this can be kinda a workout) place one knee between her either kneeling or standing lunge - have elbows out wide, fingers tilted towards each other, and lean in with bodyweight
- Hold throughout a contraction

ACUPRESSURE

****Don't use until you are at least 37 weeks and even then keep it light until you are in labor! **** Do use early in labor - before labor becomes more challenging. A distinct feeling - warmth, tingling, numbness - should be experienced when activated. Sharp pain indicates a need to adjust placement.

- Large Intestine 4 - for early stages of labor and pushing - fatty pad between base of your thumb and pointer finger
- Spleen 6 - speeds stalled labor - 4 fingers up from your inner ankle, feels tender
- Kidney 1 - calms stress and anxiety - in the middle of the foot, in the depression just beneath the ball
- C7 - stimulates contractions - in line with first prominent bone at bottom of neck- until it meets shoulder joint
- Bl32 - anesthetizing - locate dimples in lower back - Bl32 is between dimples and spine (on both sides) - should feel like a hollow, not a bony prominence

REIKI AND TENS UNITS

I am trained in using a TENS unit as well to practice Reiki - an ancient healing touch method that is gentle and soothing to both body and mind. Reach out to learn more about using these beautiful techniques in your doula or counseling package.

MASSAGE TIPS

- FOLLOW the mother's lead - touch preference change before during and after labor. Ask for permission and how it feels.
- Use an oil around your house - olive or warmed coconut oil; otherwise get some grapeseed or jojoba (safer for allergies)
- Move and intensify with breathing and contractions: work the way up the foot/hand/forearm as contraction begins then flow downward as contraction relaxes. If breathing becomes erratic and intense gently encourage calm easy breaths with this technique
- Use movement like kneading bread
- Doulas are experienced in these techniques, can provide relief to partner and more physical support

Understanding and Working with Pain

HOW?

- The more you practice the more effective these techniques will be in providing you relief!
- Find an activity you do every day where you can give these techniques practice - washing dishes, brushing teeth, driving, etc. - see the visions, repeat the affirmations, focus on breathing, etc.
- Get curious - move on from detail to detail of your experience during these exercises
- Try to suspend judgment of these details or trying to escape from them - resistance is persistence - the more we push away unwanted states the stronger they grow
- Use the techniques to cope with day to day emotional and physical pain or stress
- Practice with ice cubes - holding just one at first then working up to more, holding to the back of ears or on wrist for 60 seconds and practice these techniques. As you notice you get distracted or try to escape, use the next breath as an opportunity to come back to the technique

- **Breath Awareness** - get curious - is the breath deep or shallow, what sound does it make, when does it begin and end, where and how do I feel the breath (hot in my belly, cold as it exits my nose? whatever!)
- **Visualization Exercises** - Imagery - start painting a picture of something soothing; inspiring; (beach waves) something that represents the falling and rising intensity of surges; that represents the opening and flowing of your birth (flowers, water down a stream, in and out of a cave). Give it color, sensation, fitting words of affirmation (soften, release, melt, flow).
- **Non focused awareness** - notice everything you see, hear, taste, and smell. In birth, instead of focusing on what you feel, notice what is touching you, your breathing sensations, where you feel hot or cold, tingly, relaxed. Notice thoughts and feelings, how they change and shift, rise and fall
- **Edge** - where is your body soft, relaxed, pain free? With each breath out bring your full attention to these areas. Where does the pain begin? end?
- **Bonding with baby** - with your meditation pendulum or just rubbing your belly throughout the day - send good vibes and talk to your baby - "please come out with ease, let's work together to make your birth beautiful and healthy, I'm so grateful and full of love for you" etc. whatever feels natural and good to ya.
- **Vocalisation** - moaning low, heavy sighs, make raspberries - activation of your lower throat correlates to relaxing your bottom into contractions. Screaming, cursing, asserting boundaries may help you feel the freedom and strength you need, to create the atmosphere you need. Laughter and bonding alleviate pain - try chanting together, laugh when you make the raspberries!
- **Touch and massage** - we'll explore this more in another hand out, for now, be aware that your preferences before, during, and after labor may change around touch. Generally, a slow, repetitive, firm and sure touch is best on lower back, inner thighs or on the palm of mother's hand. Go with the flow of their breathing - firmer as contractions and breathing intensifies. Fast, frenzied breathing can be soothed by slowing down touch as contractions wane.
- **Heat** - aromatherapy packs or heated cloths - see the herbal remedies - place on lower abdomen, back and/or thighs - change out with warm ones as needed (between contractions!)
- **TENS units** - stimulate nerve fibers to override pain sensations - used in physical therapy and rehabilitation and throughout history. You can purchase and use a TENS unit pretty easily - however it is recommended you purchase one specifically for birth. I also offer TENS unit treatments in my birth and can help you learn how to use yours.
- **Movement** - women who remain mobile have shorter, less painful deliveries. So change positions, walk, dance, "**shake the apples**" - shaking the thighs and buttocks can be done by shimmying these areas with a rebozo or by hand.
- **Water** - save this for after trying other techniques if you can. Also first try the shower. Baths are amazing, but wait until you are in active labor as it can slow early labor.
- **Centering** - Can help the mother to resist running from intensity and to start working with it. Give the intensity a number on a scale from 1-10. Then try to repeat on the next contraction. IE contraction 1 was an 8. OK next contraction, gonna give another solid 8.
- **Atmosphere** - comfortable, warm, dimly lit, private. Water and hand food close at hand. Towels, blankets, and cooling tools close at hand.
- **Affirmations** - best if repeated/written and posted in highly visible areas before labor or in very early labor as a mindset prep. Love these from Mama Natural - the intensity of birth can't be stronger than me because it IS me.

Grow With Flo

Holistic Doula Services

Pain Coping Info and Exercises

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT PAIN

- Birth is **NOT** like pushing an orange out of your nostril - or like passing a kidney stone - the vagina is meant, built, to expand and birth babies.
- Pain is your body's way of telling you something is wrong, however, birth is a healthy normal process not a health problem.
- So why does it happen? Pain can be signal for how to best birth our baby - to get somewhere safe, intimate, private, and comfortable; to release the oxytocin which moves our contractions along as well as endorphins; to back off on pushing; to move into a position that works for you.
- Pain is a mindset issue - in numerous areas, including birth. Fear creates tension create pain. Exploring and working on your fears around pregnancy and parenting as well as, practicing your mindfulness and coping techniques will shift your mindset.
- What is the opposite of the fear, tension, pain cycle? reassurance relaxation, relief. Reassuring, encouraging, comforting support leads to relaxation and gratitude - which triggers a release of endorphins and relief. which leads to MORE relaxation and so on and so forth.
- Role of endorphins - nature's natural pain killer is released when we are feeling warm, loved, supported, confident, and relaxed
- So make sure you feel comfortable with the folks supporting your birth - they need to be reassuring, calm, confident in you, supportive of your choices, good communicators.
- Surround yourself with encouraging, supportive, reassuring people - people that can and will speak loving and positive words throughout your pregnancy and birth, people who aren't afraid of birth or see it as a health issue.
- Doulas can help mitigate weaknesses in your support system - facilitating resources, people, and decisions as well as providing reliable source of calm support and focus on you.
- Ina May's "Sphincter Law" principles - what helps you to relax during sex or when passing a bowel movement (both of which are possible to be painful, regardless of size) - will help you to relax in birthing: privacy, comfort - soft lights and warmth, being in a relaxed unrushed state. If the top is relaxed, so is the bottom - relax mouth and jaw with laughter, moaning, howling, heavy sighs, and blowing raspberries (which will help you laugh) also up top - your mind! Mindset practice is important!
- "Our bottom parts function best when our top part - our minds - are either grateful or amused at the antics or activities of our bottoms" cultivate humor and affection over terror, revulsion, or shame.
- In many cultures - birth is known to be relatively painless, even joyful and orgasmic - in studies where women used less pain medication and perceived less pain in birth the key difference was **expectations** - those who expected pain went on to perceive more pain and use medication.
- Again it is a lot about mindset - in these cultures there is an attitude, a conviction, that the woman's body knows best, birth is natural, nothing to be afraid of, and something women are built to do well.
- Between women who gave birth in hospital and home, there was a lower perception of pain for homebirthers. Lets look at a few factors: freedom to move, eat, and drink; intimacy, comfortable environment, and increased support; separation from attitude of birth as scary, risky, unhealthy and painful
- Finally, epidurals and other forms of pain relief are OK - if birth has been long or hard these medications can provide the rest or sense of calm needed to move forward. If using these medications confines you to a bed - use a "peanut ball" to keep the pelvis open.
- Consider nitrous oxide - its use is expanding for good reasons - very safe, low risk, with long track record and has short half life
- Remember these words from Ina May, "don't worry - only the baby will come out. I have never seen anyone explode - your body is very wise: it only pushes out what needs to come out""

Connection

PARTNER Who will be with you at your birth? Take 5 minutes a day to do one of these things or 30 minutes a week to go through each of these things together:

- Go through exploration exercises together - what are their fears? what helps them cope? what do they need in labor - to feel calm? helpful? active? ready?
- Practice a mindfulness exercise together - or sit knee to knee, one hand on each other's heart, one on your own lower abdomen. Breathe into each other's hearts for a few breaths. Focus on receiving their energy into your lower abdomen for a few breaths. Eye gaze.
- Practice partner positions
- Practice pain coping together - guide through visualization, massage, breathing, etc. - and switch!
- Have partner look over hand outs to develop their confidence and knowledge

AFTER BIRTH

"A mother has given birth"

I got many of these ideas from Pam England in her beautiful books *Birthing from Within* and *Ancient Map to Modern Birth* where you can find richer details and ideas for your parenting journey.

- **Birth Announcement** - make it fun and simple for self - doesn't have to be handmade, beautiful, and snail mail - unless you want it to be! Also can just put on facebook/insta with a beautiful image of your choosing or making. Describe the moment you became aware in your new role as a parent. Highlight what you know now about yourself but know now as a parent, how becoming a parent has changed you.
- **Meal Train and Chore List** - can be posted on your door, facebook, instagram, and referred to on your voicemail
- **Mother Healing Bath and Ritual** - soft music, dim lights, and nice smells from incense/aromatherapy/candles, take a nice long bath in healing herbs (I can provide these as part of birth package) and allow any feelings to wash over and through you. Have support people (partner, friend, family, and/or post partum doula) massage and rebozo sift your body - setting intention to acknowledge your journey and sacrifice and help your mind, body, and spirit to realign.

MOTHER BLESSING

In many other cultures, ceremonies are thrown to celebrate the mother, initiate her, and offer support to her - focus is on the the mother not the baby. Consider asking your friends to throw you a "mother blessing" insted of, or not just, a baby shower. Ideas:

- **Brainstorm** - with self and/or others - what you associate with passing through this rite of passage - food, music, decorations
- Make a **desire day** - on this day the mother can have anything her heart desires:
- presents are given to the mother not the baby
- spa day with friends at home or actually at spa - mom is massaged, her hair specially done, takes a healing aromatherapeutic bath, whatever she wants!
- **"bad moms"** friends and family come together to confess their biggest mistake as a mother
- **birth blessing bracelet** - each person brings a special bead, as they string the bead on a bracelet for the mother, they give the mother a blessing and pass it along.
- sign up for **meal train and/or chore list** for first 30 days after birth

Basic Info

PRACTITIONER AND MEDICAL CARE

- Remember B.R.A.N.D. when you are curious or confused: Ask what are the **B**enefits, **R**isks, **A**lternatives, if you do **N**othing? then **D**ecide (take time and space)
- Ask to see their rates of interventions - cesarean, episiotomies, forcep or vacuum extraction, epidurals, inductions
- Feel out their perspective on your labor preferences and independence such as freedom to make the labor room comfortable, to move and walk, get in a shower or bath, eat and drink, etc., to avoid certain interventions or choose certain practices
- Check in with your gut: do they feel good/right? Seem receptive to you, your preferences, and your birth team?

BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS

There are so many books. Pick ONE of these -whatever resonates and sounds most interesting to you. It will be enough, and you can always read another one after you are finished if you want.

- **Pam England's Birthing from Within OR Ancient Map for Modern Birth** - spiritual holistic approach for moms who see their birth as a rite of passage and want to take an intuitive approach or are healing after over medicalized birth
- **Penny Simkin's the Birth Partner** - great technical information made simple, very handy. Excellent if you want to do this with just you and one other partner - or a great read for said partner while you read something else.
- **Ina May Gaskin's Guide to Childbirth** - she's the master midwife. She covers the essentials with incredible and rich expertise put very simply. The beautiful stories in this one are very healing.
- **Marie F. Mongan's HypnoBirthing The Mongan Method** - lots of excellent pain coping and visualization exercises, very practical approach.
- **Genevieve Howland's The Mama Natural Guide to Pregnancy and Childbirth** - laid out week by week with information, tips, recipes and affirmations

QUICK ONLINE RESOURCES

- Local Knoxville Parenting and Pregnancy network and directory: Knoxville Pregnancy and Parenting
- Healthy online community where you can ask any questions: The Online Doula
- <http://www.yourchildbirthguide.com/hospital-birth.html>
- <https://www.parents.com/pregnancy/giving-birth/labor-support/labor-delivery-advice-dads/>
- <https://www.fitpregnancy.com/pregnancy/labor-delivery/common-interventions-during-labor-delivery>
- https://www.babycenter.com/O_a-childbirth-cheat-sheet-for-dads-to-be_8244.bc

REACH OUT!

Empowered, confident births are my passion. My heart doesn't want yours to feel stuck or overwhelmed. That's why I always offer free 30 minute sessions.
If you want to go further I offer a variety of services and package options:

- Therapy - prep for parenting, ensure physical health of you and your baby, break free of cycles and trauma, navigate relationships
- Support groups
- Birth Doula services integrating therapy and reiki