



Overview of the Six Lamaze Healthy Birth Practices

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Lamaze International has identified six ways to keep your birth as healthy and safe as it can be. Supported by decades of research, these practices support your body's natural ability to give birth, reserving medicines and procedures only for when they are likely to make birth safer or healthier for you and your baby.

1. Let labor begin on its own.

Induction of labor is artificially starting labor before the baby and mother's body are ready. Occasionally there are medical reasons that make induction safer than waiting for labor to begin on its own, but often labor is induced for convenience or medical situations that don't justify the risks. These risks associated with induction include a higher chance of cesarean surgery, more pain in labor, and health problems in the baby. Choose a midwife or doctor who induces labor infrequently, and carefully weigh the risks and safety of induction if it is recommended.

2. Walk, move around, and change positions throughout labor.

Being able to move around and change positions eases pain and helps labor progress. Movement works by causing contractions to work more efficiently and using gravity to help bring your baby down. Choose a birth setting with a variety of furniture as well as safe spaces for walking, a shower and a deep tub. Labor at home as long as you can, have a companion who can offer continuous support, and avoid interventions that make it harder to move, such as continuous electronic fetal monitoring or intravenous (IV) lines, unless these are necessary for a safe birth.

3. Bring a loved one, friend, or doula for continuous support.

Continuous support from a labor companion who is skilled at meeting the emotional and physical needs of laboring women makes labor easier and safer. Research confirms that support from a doula (a professional labor support companion) reduces the need for an epidural, increases the chance of having a vaginal birth, and makes the birth experience more satisfying for both women and their partners. If you choose not to have a doula, select your labor companion carefully and ask them to learn as much as they can about how to be an effective support during your labor.

4. Avoid interventions that are not medically necessary.

Interventions are procedures or treatments done to find, prevent, or fix problems. Common birth interventions include giving fluid through an IV, epidurals, continuous electronic fetal monitoring, speeding up labor with pitocin, breaking the bag of waters, and episiotomy. All interventions have risks, and many can make labor and birth more difficult and complicated. For these reasons, it is best to only use interventions when the woman and her care provider agree that the likely benefits outweigh the possible risks and when safer alternatives will not be effective. Talk with your care provider well before labor about common labor interventions to find out their thoughts and let them know yours. Learn about each intervention to understand when they may become necessary and how to have a healthy and satisfying birth if they do.

5. Avoid giving birth on your back, and follow your body's urges to push.

By standing, kneeling, squatting, or lying on your side in the second stage of labor, you use gravity to your advantage and allow your pelvic bones to stay loose and open to help the baby come down. Following your own urge to push is less exhausting than being directed to push forcefully while holding your breath. It is also safer for you and your baby. Practice pushing positions before labor so you are comfortable with them, and choose a care provider who will encourage you to stay off your back and push with your own urges.

6. Keep your baby with you—it's best for you, your baby, and breastfeeding.

From the moment he or she is born, the healthiest place for your baby is right in your arms. Skin to skin, your baby more easily transitions to breathing, stays at just the right temperature, and learns instinctively how to nurse. Research also tells us that babies who go to the hospital nursery at night cry more and are more likely to have trouble breastfeeding than babies who room-in with their mothers. Unless you or your baby has a medical problem that requires you to be apart from one another, keep your baby with you.