

The word ‘doula’— pronounced ‘doo-la’ — is a Greek word meaning ‘woman servant or caregiver’. It refers to someone who offers emotional and physical support to a woman and her partner before, during, and after childbirth. A doula believes in ‘mothering the mother’. Doulas are trained and experienced in childbirth. While they have good knowledge and awareness of the birth process, a doula does not support the mother in a medical role; that is the job of the midwife or doctor. A doula helps to keep birth normal (if that is the wishes of the birthing mother) and is a valuable addition to the birth team.

Should a birth become complicated and require medical assistance, a doula will remain by your side and help in any way possible. A doula will not make decisions for those she supports but will assist them through the decision making process. A doula provides balanced information so the couple can make their own choices.

Many women consider doulas to be an absolute necessity, especially for those giving birth in a hospital. Due to the over-medicalization of birth, inductions of labor have skyrocketed, and are partly to blame for the 30% of American babies now born via C-section. Some hospitals sport C-section rates of 50% and higher. This is a shocking statistic, well above the World Health Organization recommendations of 10-15% — after this amount; it doesn’t save any further lives, which is what the C-section was intended for.

A birth doula

- Recognizes birth as a key experience the mother will remember all her life
- Understands the physiology of birth and the emotional needs of a woman in labor
- Assists the woman in preparing for and carrying out her plans for birth
- Stays with the woman throughout the labor
- Provides emotional support, physical comfort measures and an objective viewpoint, as well as helping the woman get the information she needs to make informed decisions
- Facilitates communication between the laboring woman, her partner and her clinical care providers
- Perceives her role as nurturing and protecting the woman’s memory of the birth experience
- Allows the woman’s partner to participate at his/her comfort level

What are the benefits of having a doula?

Numerous clinical studies have found that a doula’s presence at birth

- Tends to result in shorter labors with fewer complications
- Reduces negative feelings about one’s childbirth experience
- Reduces the need for Pitocin (a labor-inducing drug), forceps or vacuum extraction and cesareans
- Reduces the mother’s request for pain medication and/or epidurals

Research shows parents who receive continuous support can

- Feel more secure and cared for
- Are more successful in adapting to new family dynamics
- Have greater success with breastfeeding
- Have greater self-confidence
- Have less postpartum depression
- Have lower incidence of abuse

Frequently asked questions

What if I want an epidural?

That's great! Pain management is a personal decision, can be empowering, and I fully support your choice! A doula is specially trained to help provide comfort measures. It might be massage, it might be using water, it might be counter pressure or help with movement, but a doula will be able to help you keep your cool before, during, and after an epidural. Additionally, after receiving an epidural, it is essential that you remain moving. A doula will make sure you're changing positions every 20 minutes. Every position you can do out of bed, you can do in a bed.

Does a doula replace my partner or support person?

Never. Doulas and support people make a fantastic team! Doulas encourage and enable partners and support people to be as involved as they want to be. I pride myself on overseeing the labor process and giving partners and support people the tools they need to support the laboring person with confidence. Support people commonly report higher satisfaction in birth when a doula is present.

I have a midwife, do I need a doula?

Absolutely! Whether you decide to work with a midwife, OB, General Practitioner in a hospital setting, or home birth, a doula is an essential member of your birth team. A birth doula offers continuous support-- your provider is medically responsible for many people at one time. A doula is solely dedicated to one person in labor at a time. This kind of support has shown to have many benefits, including a high reduction in interventions and increased comfort for both the laboring and support person. Medical providers are not able to give continuous support, particularly in a hospital setting.

Can a doula give medical advice or make decisions for me?

A doula does not make medical decisions for clients or intervene in their clinical care. A doula may provide information and emotional support and help you to process or make decisions. A doula can provide the information to help parents make appropriate decisions, to know when to reach out to a provider for help and facilitate communication between the medical care providers.

I need to have a cesarean. Why do I need a doula?

Cesarean birth is still a birth. Your birth doula is your support and advocate as you wait and is prepped for surgery and recover from surgery. Depending on hospital policies and your situation, they may be able to support you in the operating room. They will be at your side in the recovery room and can help you and your family with any questions or concerns that may arise, helping you understand what your care providers are saying, and attending to your comfort and needs. They can assist with bonding and breastfeeding and help to navigate recovery.