

Types of Birthing Classes

For expectant parents, birthing classes can be a great resource to help make important decisions regarding the baby's birth and ask any questions about labor and delivery. Mothers usually take birthing classes during the third trimester of pregnancy (around the seventh month). However, some classes may begin earlier or later than this. There are many benefits to birthing classes as well as a few different types.

Benefits of Birthing Classes

There is a lot of beneficial information you can learn from a birthing class. Some of this information may include:

- Relaxation and breathing techniques
- The role of the birthing coach or labor partner
- What to be prepared for during labor and delivery
- Pain relief options
- How to create a birth plan
- How your baby is developing
- Warning signs that something is wrong
- How to make your pregnancy and delivery more comfortable
- How to know when you are going into labor
- Baby care
- Breastfeeding
- How to cope with emotional changes

Lamaze Technique

Lamaze is the most commonly used childbirth method used in the United States. Lamaze classes approach childbirth as a healthy and natural process of life. While these courses do not discourage medical intervention during labor, they seek to inform expectant mothers of all available options so that they can make the best decisions for themselves. In general, the classes discuss how to build up the mother's confidence and how to keep the delivery as safe and simple as possible.

Lamaze classes are comprised of at least 12 hours of instruction in total. In the classes, you will learn more about the following:

- Normal labor, birth and postpartum care
- Various ways to position yourself during labor

- Relaxation and massage techniques, and how to practice relaxation using external and internal focal points (focusing on an object, or visualizing and thinking about a pleasant experience)
- Breathing techniques
- Support during labor
- Medical interventions and procedures
- Good communication skills
- Breastfeeding
- Healthy lifestyle choices

The Bradley Method

This method is also referred to as “husband-coached birth.” Classes teaching the Bradley method focus on preparing the mother to deliver without pain medication and how the father can be the mother’s “birth coach.” However, this course also does prepare parents for the possibility of unexpected situations, such as an emergency cesarean section.

Bradley method classes are usually 12 sessions long and cover the following information:

- Relaxation techniques to manage pain
- Nutrition and exercise during pregnancy
- How to avoid an emergency cesarean section
- Labor rehearsals
- Breastfeeding
- Postpartum care
- Guidance for the mother’s birthing coach

The Alexander Technique

This technique focuses on helping mothers avoid mental and physical tension before and during labor and delivery. Classes teaching the Alexander technique are designed to help mothers improve coordination, movement and flexibility. Practice is encouraged in these classes, as the more the mother practices, the better she becomes at improving her ease of movement during delivery.

Mothers can expect to learn more about the following:

- How to improve one’s comfort while pregnant
- How to effectively push during delivery
- Postpartum recovery.
- Reducing discomfort during breastfeeding

HypnoBirthing

This type of birthing method is also called the Mongan method. It is a natural approach involving self-hypnosis. This hypnosis does not involve being asleep or in a trance; rather, the mother will feel as if she is

intently focused. During hypnobirthing, the mother is very relaxed, but still in full control and aware of the body's movement and surges. However, the mother will be able to control how and to what intensity she experiences these surges in order to have as comfortable a delivery as possible.

There are five classes in total, during which mothers will learn more about the following:

- Why labor hurts
- What can be done to reduce the pain
- The physical and chemical changes that cause anxiety and fear to build up
- How calming techniques work
- The relationship between fear and pain
- How to prevent the release of negative hormones which can cause the body to constrict during labor

How to Find a Birthing Class

There are several resources through which you can find out more about birthing classes, including:

- Your family doctor
- Your obstetrician or midwife
- Friends and family who have taken a birthing class
- Birth centers, hospitals and pregnancy centers
- Community centers
- Childbirth education organizations

If you are interested in a certain course but do not have access to it in your area, look into courses available online, on DVD or in books.

Resources

- Office on Women's Health: www.womenshealth.gov/pregnancy/getting-ready/birthing-parenting-class.html
- MedlinePlus: www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/childbirth.html
- Lamaze International: www.lamaze.org
- The Bradley Method of Husband-Coached Natural Childbirth: www.bradleybirth.com
- The Complete Guide to the Alexander Technique: www.alexandertechnique.com
- HypnoBirthing - The Mongan Method: www.hypnobirthing.com

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