

What the Heck Is A Birth Center And Why Would I Choose To Have My Baby There???

There are many reasons why people choose to have their baby in a birth center. One of the main reasons is that birth centers differ from hospitals in that they provide personalized care and a home-like environment. Because a birth center is a smaller, more intimate setting, they are able to offer a continuity of care that a hospital setting simply isn't able to meet. Birth centers are designed to promote comfort for a laboring woman by using natural methods of pain relief and relaxation rather than anesthesia to ease discomfort. Rather than being confined to a bed with continuous monitoring, a laboring woman is encouraged to move freely and have more control over her body while regularly listening to the baby's heartbeat with a device that doesn't need to be strapped on. Finally, birth centers employ highly trained staff with specialized skills in natural birth outside of the hospital that keep mothers and babies safe when things do not go as planned. All these elements combine to create a loving, supportive, and inviting atmosphere for birth without a large degree of medical intervention, and create beautiful outcomes that honor Mom, Baby, and their loved ones.

Birth centers differ from location to location. So, for the purpose of this article, I will speak about our own facility, Best Start Birth Center, located in San Diego, California. Best Start is the only state-licensed, nationally accredited, free-standing birth center in Southern California. That means we are not part of a hospital or HMO, and the physical site is completely outside of the hospital. Best Start is a private practice owned and operated by midwives. We have physicians associated with the practice with whom we consult and refer clients to as needed, but they are not present for births -- it is the midwives who attend the births and determine the character of the practice. Best Start is also the only facility in San Diego offering waterbirths. It has a complete program devoted to childbearing that starts with prenatal care and childbirth education, includes labor support and guidance, the baby's birth and all care afterward.

Home-Like Environment:

What makes a birth center so unique is that it offers a home-like environment that is separate from the hospital but still part of the health care system. In addition to prenatal and postpartum care, Best Start also provides well-woman care, and preconception, family planning and contraception counseling for our clients. Our birth center has comfortably decorated private birth suites with private attached bathrooms. We feature oversized tubs for labor and water births, birthing balls, birthing stools, and many other items that allow the laboring woman to find positions that are most suitable for her during her labor and delivery.

Continuity of Care:

Continuity of care is one of the leading reasons birth center popularity is on the rise. During prenatal care at Best Start, the woman and family get to know all of our midwives and staff. Clients are not assigned to a specific midwife, so when labor begins, they just call the midwife who is on-call and discuss when it is time to come to the birth center. When it is time to go to the birth center, the midwife meets the client there and remains with her throughout labor. As delivery approaches, the midwife will call our on-call Birth Assistant, (RN, LVN, or MA) to provide extra help with the birth. About two hours after giving birth, if all is normal, the midwife signs out and the nurse stays with the mom and baby for the rest of the recovery. It's that simple! We are designed to assist healthy moms during delivery of one baby, head down, at term. We don't do high risk deliveries, we just attend normal births, without anesthesia and unnecessary medical intervention.

Comfort in Labor:

To promote comfort in labor, we do not use continuous fetal monitoring which requires elastic belts around the abdomen. We want the laboring woman to walk around and change position freely, so we check the baby's heartbeat regularly with a Doppler; and that gives us the information we need to reassure all present regarding the baby's wellbeing.

We strongly encourage expecting parents to take a childbirth class. Any method preferred is fine, but classes are not required in order to give birth at the birth center.

- We encourage eating and drinking while in labor.
- We can use IVs if needed but do not use them routinely.
- Personal items to promote comfort are encouraged. Popular items include candles and music.

- We do not have an epidural service, but we use natural methods of pain relief and relaxation stemming from complimentary therapies, such as massage, healing touch therapy, acupuncture, and aromatherapy. Coping with pain and discomfort is easier in a low-tech, homelike environment.
- Laboring in warm water and birthing in a tub is also an option.

Your Birth Your Way:

Women may labor and birth in any position they choose: Side-lying, standing, squatting, hands and knees, or in the water. Also, her partner may deliver the baby, or she may deliver the baby herself. In any event, the midwife will be there to assist.

Immediately after birth, the baby goes to the breast, (birth centers encourage breastfeeding, and the best way to ensure a healthy bond between mom and baby is to establish breastfeeding as soon as possible after birth). Usually, Dad or a family member cuts the cord once it has stopped pulsating. Then, the midwife attends to delivery of the placenta and checks for any repairs. We do not perform episiotomies routinely, and our midwives are very good at protecting the tissues while they gently stretch, so any repairs they must make are usually superficial.

Certification:

All our midwives are Certified Nurse-Midwives. That means they were registered nurses first, continued their education into advanced practice, and have been licensed by the State of California to practice midwifery and certified by the American College of Nurse-Midwives. Since the 1980s, all Nurse-Midwife education programs provide a Master's degree in Nursing and Midwifery.

Some advantages of a "Best Start Birth Center" birth are:

- Continuity of care: The people seen during prenatal appointments are the people who will be at the birth.
- We have an experienced staff dedicated to providing sensitive, individualized and culturally competent care that honors the mom, the family, and the miracle of birth.
- All birth rooms and suites are private and pleasantly decorated creating a home-like environment.
- All of our nurses and midwives are experienced in their field.
- In labor, each woman receives one-on-one care and support from her midwife and/or nurse.
- Options - Each woman chooses how she will deliver, who will be present and in what atmosphere. There is also always the option to change her mind about birth location. Transfers to the hospital are easily carried out if needed or requested.

What if Something Goes Wrong:

Now, you ask what if something goes wrong? At every prenatal visit our clients are assessed for their suitability to deliver at the birth center. If, for any reason, it is not appropriate for a client to deliver at the birth center, her care is transferred to a physician and she is transferred to a hospital. We have OB/GYN consulting physicians to refer our clients to as needed.

Midwives adhere to the same standards of care as the community physicians and nurses, so the basis of the care received is the same. It is the personal approach and respect for the individual wishes of the mother, and knowledge of normal birth without anesthesia that sets midwifery care in the birth center setting apart from medical care. The art of midwifery is to provide a safe and emotionally satisfying birth experience according to the personal wishes and desires of the mom. Midwives in birth centers are limited to caring for moms with low-risk pregnancies. That means that Mom is healthy, and has only one healthy baby coming head first. If Mom and baby come into labor healthy, statistics show the probability is very high that they will deliver safely.

In labor, about 7% (updated Jan. '08) of our Best Start Birth Center ladies are transferred to the hospital. The number one reason is that labor has stalled and is no longer progressing. A stalled labor is very disappointing but is NOT an emergency. We work with nearby hospitals for emergency and non-emergency transfers. For emergencies, we call an ambulance and transfer to a nearby hospital equipped and ready for just such a situation.

- Of our ladies who are transferred to the hospital, a little less than half are delivered by cesarean section, for an overall rate of 3% for the birth center. (C-section rate for the US is 31.1%, according to the CDC Report, Dec.2007)

In summary, the advantages of childbirth without anesthesia in a birth center is that the mother and her family can make their own decisions, experience the richness of emotion and immense personal empowerment of the miracle of normal childbirth. While the goal of good outcomes for mothers and babies is always the objective, we think the process of getting to that goal is eminently important. Best Start Birth Center exists to improve the health and well-being of women, babies, and their families...This means including the loved ones of the laboring mom and creating a meaningful birth experience, "*your birth your way*".

Best Start accepts patients who are covered by:

- Private Insurance
- Select HMO's
- MediCal
- MediCare
- CHAMPUS Tricare/Prime
- AIM through Molina
- Best Start also has very reasonable Cash Programs for those who have insurance that does not cover Birth Centers or Midwives.



-Karen H. Roslie~ Executive Administrator

Best Start Birth Center

"Your Birth Your Way"

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