

# Positive Pregnancy Test? Do This FIRST!





**T**he two most important decisions that expectant parents make early in a pregnancy are where to give birth, and who to use as a care provider during birth. These two choices have the biggest impact in the experience and outcomes of labor and delivery.

A 2013 survey called “Listening to Mothers III” showed that while many women who had recently given birth ranked the quality of their care as high, authors of the study cite 21 areas of concern where women commonly receive care that is not supported by best evidence or best practice, and women have gaps in knowledge regarding common interventions. Quality of care varies widely from facility to facility, and from provider to provider. Research shows that the maternity care women receive in the United States leads to worse outcomes and is more costly than maternity care in many other industrialized countries.

For these reasons, it is important that expectant parents know what high-quality, high value maternity care looks like, and they actively seek it out before pregnancy or early in pregnancy. I counsel women to find the place where they want to give birth FIRST, THEN find a care provider – here’s why:





## FIND YOUR FACILITY FIRST, THEN FIND YOUR CARE PROVIDER



If you choose to give birth in a hospital, you should know that the nurse and hospital staff will be spending much more time with you during your labor than your doctor will. Hospital policies strongly influence how doctors and nurses make decisions about your care.

It is easier to find a hospital you like and *then* find a doctor or midwife you like who has privileges there, than to fight against the culture of a facility that is a poor fit for you. For these reasons, it makes sense to choose the facility first, and then the care provider.

There are only a few birth facilities in a community, but dozens of doctors and midwives to choose from, so it is very likely you will be able to find a care provider whose birth philosophy matches yours and who works at the facility you have chosen.

In order to know what to look for during your tours and interviews with doctors and midwives you should have some basic knowledge about evidence-based care under your belt. I recommend familiarizing yourself with the [Mother-Friendly Childbirth Initiative](#); a great place to start learning about evidence-based maternity care. As you are learning about what high-quality maternity care looks like, start to develop some thoughts and ideas about what is important to *you personally* about the care you want to receive.



What would your ideal birth look like? If you haven't thought about that yet, consider doing an [Envision Your Ideal Birth session](#) with me and we can figure it out together!

Since there is such variety of philosophies, cultures, and quality of care between facilities and providers, it is important to research all of the options that are available to you in your community before making a final choice. By exploring several locations, you will get a better sense of the differences between facilities and will be better able to choose which one will be the best fit for you.

Keep in mind that the philosophy of care and the birth facility culture will have a much greater impact on your birth outcome than what the birthing rooms look like. Fancy rooms do not equal high-quality care. For example, if you give birth in a hospital with a high rate of cesarean surgeries, you are statistically more likely to have a cesarean birth there. Or, if the nurses are trained in hands-on comfort techniques or the hospital is designated Baby-Friendly you are more likely to receive nursing care to support you in your labor and early breastfeeding.

Because early prenatal care is important and you will want to decide on a care giver early on, I suggest that **before pregnancy** or **early in your pregnancy** you tour several birth facilities before you make a decision as to where you would like to have your birth. If there is more than one hospital available to you, tour two or three.

Also tour birth centers and, if you are interested, speak to a homebirth midwife to learn about the option of giving birth at home. If you have never thought of using a midwife for your maternity care, or your first instinct is to say, "No way!" I would suggest that you see if there is a birth center nearby and interview a midwife anyway, to be thorough in your research. The medical model of care and the midwifery model are quite different and you might find that midwifery suits you better. Some midwives work in hospitals too.

Use the [10 Questions to Ask](#) to learn about the policies, procedures, philosophy, and culture of each facility you tour. Keep notes of each tour so that you can compare them. Make your choice based on the one that will provide you with the most evidence-based, woman and family-centered care that matches with your individual needs and desires.

Once you have decided where to give birth, interview care providers who have privileges at that facility. Sometimes this is hard to do because doctors and midwives are busy or may not be willing to do a consultation they cannot bill for, but many will take five or ten minutes to speak with a prospective client.



This, in itself, may be an indication of the priorities of the practice. If you can't speak with the doctor or midwife, speak with an office manager, physician's assistant, or advanced practice nurse who can tell you about the practice. Again, use the [10 Questions to Ask](#) to guide your interviews.

How do you find providers to interview? Connect with your local BirthNetwork National chapter, an independent birth network, a birth circle, or doula group, since childbirth educators and doulas can be great resources for that information. Every community has a "birth community" of women and men who advocate for woman-centered, optimal birth. It may be informal or very organized, and finding a "gatekeeper" into that community can open doors of information and support that you would not find anywhere else.

When you get referrals from friends, family, or community resources about doctors or midwives, ask lots of questions about why the person liked the care they received. Their priorities, needs, or desires may be very different from yours, and what they loved might be the exact opposite of what you are looking for in a caregiver.

Talk to lots of other women about their births. Many people find it helpful to hear about other people's experiences with facilities and care providers to aid them in their decision-making.

The choice of a location and a care provider for birth are the two most influential decisions expectant parents make that effect their experiences during birth. Using the tools at your disposal such as pregnancy mentoring with me, [The Birth Lady](#), the *Mother-Friendly Childbirth Initiative*, the *10 Questions to Ask*, and community resources can help you find important information about maternity care in your community. Plan ahead to give birth to great things!

Would you like to learn more? Download my free audio class, [The First Five Things To Do When You Are Pregnant](#).





## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



As a birth professional and a mother, I have spoken with hundreds of women about their birth experiences. Expectant parents who are informed and prepared are more likely to have better health outcomes and more positive births. My Mastering Maternity System™ can teach you the advocacy skills you need and give you tools and information to navigate the maternity care system with confidence. Whether you are already pregnant and looking for guidance, or planning ahead to get pregnant within the next year, you will find

information and support for your journey to parenthood.

As a maternity consultant I offer private and group coaching and educational programs for expectant parents to help them prepare for future pregnancy, and to support them throughout pregnancy into early parenting. How can I help you?

*Michal Klau-Stevens is **The Birth Lady**. She is a maternity consultant, pregnancy coach, consumer expert on maternity care issues, Past President of BirthNetwork National, Lamaze Certified Childbirth Educator, and mother. Her website is [TheBirthLady.Info](http://TheBirthLady.Info). Find her on Facebook at [The Birth Lady](#) page!*

Visit [www.TheBirthLady.INFO](http://www.TheBirthLady.INFO) to learn more about the Mastering Maternity System™ programs from The Birth Lady!



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