



Tips for Writing a Birth Preferences List

Why not just call it a birth plan? Because birth is different for everyone, and we can never know exactly what a person's birth experience will be like!

A Birth Preference List is not a list of priorities set in stone. Instead, it helps you:

- Prepare for your baby's birth and for possible unexpected events
- Research details before you go into labor
- Feel equipped to make informed decisions
- Communicate and negotiate with caregivers
- Open the door to envisioning different possibilities

Birth rarely aligns with a predetermined plan - and that's okay (and normal)! Being educated on our options and staying flexible in our expectations allows for a more satisfying and fulfilling birth experience.

Recommendations:

1. Keep your birth preferences list to one page, ideally bullet points, with a simple font. This increases the likelihood that your busy care provider will read it in full.
2. Many hospitals provide a template or customizable birth plan. Use this as a guide for researching options and deciding what feels right for you. You can attach your Birth Preferences list to the hospital plan, and it will cover anything that the hospital checklist doesn't, or is especially important to you.
3. If there is one overriding concern, list that alone. Some examples: "we would like to receive our baby," or a statement that the birthing person will ask for pain management if desired (vs being offered).
4. Start with something personal about you and your hopes for this labor. Emphasize the positive and foster a sense of teamwork with the care team, for example: *"Thank you for supporting us during our birth, and for helping us meet our baby! We're prepared to be flexible and go with the flow as our birth unfolds. Most importantly, our goal is healthy mom and baby, but we value the experience we will have welcoming our baby into our family. Here are some of our hopes/goals: thank you for supporting and respecting this transition and once-in-a lifetime experience."*
5. Note what you learn in your reading, researching, and childbirth class. Discuss with your partner the aspects of labor and birth that are most important to you, as well as possible interventions and options. Identify any gray areas and make some decisions.
6. Take your notes, questions, and birth preferences to a prenatal appointment: ask questions, and make sure you and your care provider are in alignment about your preferences and their protocols. Asking questions of your caregivers during pregnancy will eliminate any big surprises during labor.
7. Include any special requirements, fears or need specific kinds of help or care. Give them an idea of sensitive areas (such as fear of needles, medical trauma, etc.).



The following is a list of things to consider including in your Birth Preferences List: this is an opportunity for you and your partner to do some research and have a conversation about what these things are and what you would prefer. You do not need to include all of these items on your Birth Preferences List: just the few that stand out as feeling very important to you & your experience.

1. **Pain management:** you don't have to know for sure, just have an idea of what your goal may be with regards to pain management medication. [Here is a great exercise to help identify your thoughts and preferences around pain management.](#)
2. **Names:** of the support people there with you, sex of your baby, and their name if you have already chosen it.
3. **Preferences for labor:** laboring and pushing in different positions, do you want to see the baby come out, does one parent want to catch the baby or cut the cord.
4. **Medical interventions:** intermittent vs continuous fetal monitoring, breaking the bag of waters, preferred frequency of cervical checks, saline lock for the IV,
5. **Preferences for an induction:** understand the process and medications for labor induction, and identify any preferences within the options. [More info on prepping for an induction here.](#)
6. **Preferences for a cesarean birth:** see info on [Family Centered Cesarean Birth.](#)
7. **Plan for the placenta:** if you wish to take it home with you.
8. **Newborn preferences:** Timing and location of newborn procedures (many of them can be done with the baby skin-to-skin), and any preferences about them (Vitamin K shot, erythromycin eye ointment, Hepatitis B vaccine, circumcision (which doesn't happen immediately after the baby is born, but will be done before you are discharged from the hospital))
9. **How can your care team make you feel safe and comfortable?**
 - Share any anxieties or triggers related to labor and birth.
 - History of medical or personal trauma (ie are you nervous in hospitals, or are there parts of your body that you do not want touched).
 - Needs/preferences for cervical checks or having any procedures done to your body
 - Keep noise to a minimum, keep ins and outs to a minimum, lights dim, no students

Remember that your birth preferences are a guideline to your hopes, dreams, feelings and preferences, rather than a directive. It shows that you have thought seriously and carefully about this transformational event, and provides a tool for communication between partners and care providers.