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## Professional Labor Support

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### What is a doula?

"Doula" refers to a supportive companion who is professionally trained to provide labor support. There is also a postpartum doula, who provides support during the postpartum period. We will be talking mostly about labor doulas.

A doula performs **no medical tasks**. Instead, she provides physical, emotional, and informational support to women and their partners during labor and birth. She gives help and advice on comfort measures such as breathing, relaxation, massage, and positioning. She assists families in gathering information about their options for labor. She usually will meet with the family at least once before the birth, to gain a rapport. She provides continuous emotional reassurance and comfort. She has important, though non-medical, skills such as massage and reflexology. She knows many comfort measures for the laboring woman. She assists the partner in playing an active role in the birth. She can act as a liaison between the hospital staff and the family. She helps the woman have a spiritual, satisfying birth.

### Who needs a doula?

First time moms, VBAC moms, moms having cesareans, moms wanting a natural birth, all these moms and their partners could benefit from having a doula. As a first time mom, it is helpful to have someone there who knows what's happening. A VBAC mom can benefit greatly from the reassurance a doula continuously gives. A mom having a cesarean can be comforted by her doula. Moms wanting less intervention can be greatly increase their chances of a beautiful birth by having a doula as part of their birth team. A mom with special needs is strengthened by her doula.



### **Do Dads need Doulas?**

We expect so much from our partners- but they haven't (first time or VBAC dads) done this before, either. They are in need of the same kind of reassurance that moms are. Their experience is enhanced by having a doula.

### **When should I hire a doula?**

Most doulas only take a few clients a month, so consultations should be considered as early as possible.

### **Where do I find a doula?**

The website [www.doulamatch.net](http://www.doulamatch.net) is an excellent resource for finding a doula in your area. You can find one through your childbirth educator, or midwife. Your hospital may have references.

### **A Doula Provides...**

- emotional support
- explanations of medical procedures
- advice during pregnancy
- exercise and physical suggestions to make pregnancy more comfortable
- help with preparing a birth plan
- massage and other non-pharmaceutical pain relief measures
- positioning suggestions during labor and birth
- help support the partner
- help with breast-feeding preparation-written record of birth
- may have other talents that vary.

### **Questions to ask a prospective doula:**

- What training have you had?
- Are you certified?
- What have been your experiences with birth, personally and as a doula?
- What type of birth have you witnessed? i.e... cesarean, natural, VBAC, breech
- What is your philosophy about childbirth and supporting women and their partners through labor?



- What do you see your role as in early labor, labor, and birth?
- May we call you with questions/concerns before the birth?
- What care providers have you worked with?
- In what hospitals have you attended births?
- Have you attended home births?
- When do you try to join women in labor?
- Will you come to our home for early labor?
- Do you have any other clients due near my due date?
- How many clients do you have a month?
- Do you have a back-up doula? Who is she?
- What is your fee? Is any part of your fee refundable if you do not attend the birth?
- What does the fee include?
- Can you provide references?