



Doula: The Woman Caregiver

A doula is someone who provides non-clinical support before, during, and following the birthing process. After developing a personal relationship with you, a doula helps to achieve your ideal birth. For some, this includes pain coping measures for a natural birth, or various coping strategies

prior to some form of pain medication. Experienced doulas will have the knowledge to discern what is normal in the course of the average term pregnancy and labor, and will be able to discuss options with you. They will help you work through different birth scenarios and provide non-biased, research-based information regarding statistics and birth outcomes. For example, if you are considering moving into a different position – how might that affect the baby or your labor? What positions are least likely to stress your body and the baby, while being the most effective at progressing your labor?

The doula provides constant support twenty-four hours a day, including the time spent at home in early labor. In addition to providing physical support, such as massage and relaxation techniques, a large part of what a doula helps with is mom's emotional state. Most women will come to a point in labor where they are tired and feel like they can't continue. Your doula is there to listen and buoy you up when you need a lift!

Ideally, the doula will continue seeing the mother postpartum, both at the hospital and at home. Even if a woman did not have a doula for her birth, postpartum doulas are available and can be a huge help to mom. Paid hourly, they can be an extra pair of hands – rocking/holding the baby so mom can rest or bathe, cooking meals, light housework, or grocery shopping. They may be able to assist with breastfeeding if they have additional certifications in that specialty.

There have been many research studies showing that delivering with a doula decreases anxiety, shortens labor, improves birth outcome and increases maternal – infant bonding. By removing fear, women are able to embrace the experience and recall their birth happily, because they were completely supported and made well informed choices along the way.

Kimberly Putney, Doula