



A COMPLETE BIRTH PREP & DELIVERY GUIDE

LABOR READY

The Complete Birth Prep & Delivery Guide — Real Steps To Walk In
Prepared, Not Panicked.

NO FEAR-MONGERING. NO FLUFF. JUST WHAT TO ACTUALLY DO.

BEFORE YOU START

Let's Talk About The Fear In The Room

Somewhere between the second trimester and now, labor stopped being an abstract future event and started being a real thing that is actually going to happen to your body. That shift is when the anxiety usually kicks in — not because you're not strong enough, but because nobody handed you a clear plan for what to actually do.

This guide is that plan. Not a list of horror stories, not a list of things that could go wrong — a practical, step-by-step walk from where you are right now to the day you meet your baby.

What This Guide Actually Does

- Breaks birth prep into three clear phases, so you always know what to focus on next.
- Gives you real checklists for your hospital bag, birth plan, and what to discuss with your provider.
- Explains what labor actually feels like and what happens at each stage, in plain language.
- Covers comfort measures and coping techniques that actually help during contractions.
- Answers the questions you're afraid to ask out loud.

What This Guide Is Not

- This is not a medical textbook, and it doesn't replace your provider's guidance.
- This is not a guide designed to scare you into thinking every birth goes wrong.
- This is not one-size-fits-all — it's a framework you adapt to your own birth plan and preferences.

THE BASICS, SIMPLIFIED

What Labor Actually Is, Stage By Stage

Nobody explains this well before it happens to you. Here's labor broken into its real stages, in plain language, so none of it catches you off guard.

Early Labor

Contractions start, usually mild and irregular, spaced far apart. Your cervix begins to dilate. This stage can last hours, and for many first-time moms, it's the longest part — most of it happens at home.

Active Labor

Contractions get stronger, longer, and closer together. This is usually when you head to the hospital or birth center, or call your midwife if you're at home. This is where most of the coping techniques in this guide come in.

Transition

The most intense but shortest phase of labor. Contractions are close together and powerful. This is the hardest part emotionally and physically — and also the sign that pushing is close.

Pushing & Delivery

You work with your contractions to bring your baby down and out. This can take anywhere from a few minutes to a few hours, especially for first-time moms.

Delivering The Placenta

Often overlooked in birth conversations, but it's a real part of labor — a few more contractions deliver the placenta shortly after your baby arrives.

REAL TALK

Labor rarely goes exactly like the diagrams. Some women barely notice early labor; others feel every stage intensely. Both are normal. This guide gives you the map — your labor writes its own route.

THE FRAMEWORK

How This Guide Works

Instead of one overwhelming checklist, this guide is broken into three phases that follow your actual pregnancy timeline. Work through them in order as you approach your due date.

PHASE	FOCUS	WHAT HAPPENS
1	Prepare	Learn the basics, choose your care team and birth setting, start researching your options.
2	Pack & Plan	Build your hospital bag, write your birth plan, line up your support people.
3	Labor Day Ready	Know your signs, your comfort measures, and exactly what to do when it starts.

Start Phase 1 as early as your second trimester if you can — but if you're finding this guide later, you can move through all three phases faster. There's no wrong time to get prepared.

PHASE 1

Prepare

This phase is about building your foundation — understanding your options and choosing the team and setting that feel right for you, before the late-pregnancy rush sets in.

RESEARCH & DECISIONS *Choosing Your Care Team & Setting*

KEY DECISIONS

- ☐ Confirm your care provider (OB, midwife, or a combination) and feel confident asking them questions.
- ☐ Decide on your birth setting: hospital, birth center, or home birth, and understand what each involves.
- ☐ Ask your provider about their approach to pain management, interventions, and birth plans.

GET EDUCATED

- ☐ Take a childbirth education class, in person or online, if you haven't already.
- ☐ Tour your hospital or birth center so the space feels familiar, not intimidating.
- ☐ Start learning basic breathing and relaxation techniques now, so they feel natural later.

BUILD YOUR SUPPORT TEAM

- ☐ Decide who will be in the room with you, and talk through their role ahead of time.
- ☐ If you're considering a doula, start researching and interviewing now — good ones book up early.
- ☐ Line up help for after birth: meals, household support, or someone to help with other children.

REAL TALK

You don't need to have every decision locked in during Phase 1. The goal here is direction, not perfection — you'll refine all of this in Phase 2.

PHASE 2

Pack & Plan

This is where things get concrete. You'll build your actual hospital bag, put your birth plan on paper, and make sure everyone around you knows the plan too.

HOSPITAL BAG *What To Pack For Mom, Partner & Baby*

FOR YOU

- ☐ Comfortable robe or nightgown, and going-home outfit (think postpartum-friendly, not pre-pregnancy size).
- ☐ Toiletries, phone charger with a long cord, and your own pillow if you want one.
- ☐ Snacks and a water bottle — labor can take a while, and hospital food isn't always available on demand.

FOR YOUR PARTNER / SUPPORT PERSON

- ☐ A change of clothes and toiletries — they may be there longer than expected too.
- ☐ Snacks and cash for vending machines or parking.
- ☐ A list of who to call once baby arrives, so you don't have to think about it in the moment.

FOR BABY

- ☐ A going-home outfit in a couple of different sizes (newborn and 0-3 months).
- ☐ A properly installed car seat — most hospitals will check this before you're allowed to leave.
- ☐ A swaddle blanket and hat for the ride home.

YOUR BIRTH PLAN *Putting Your Preferences On Paper*

COVER THESE BASICS

- ☐ Who you want in the room, and who you don't.
- ☐ Your preferences on pain management — open to an epidural, hoping to avoid one, or undecided.
- ☐ Your preferences for movement during labor: walking, birthing ball, water, position changes.

THINK THROUGH THE WHAT-IFS

- ☐ Your preferences if labor needs to be induced or sped up.
- ☐ Your preferences around interventions like an episiotomy or assisted delivery, if needed.
- ☐ Your preferences for skin-to-skin time and delayed cord clamping, if important to you.

SHARE IT

- ☐ Print a one-page version to bring with you — simple bullet points, not paragraphs.
- ☐ Talk it through with your provider ahead of time so there are no surprises.
- ☐ Make sure your partner or support person knows the plan well enough to advocate for you if needed.

REAL TALK

A birth plan is a set of preferences, not a contract. Write it so you feel prepared — not so you feel like anything other than exactly-as-planned is a failure. Flexibility is part of the plan too.

PHASE 3

Labor Day Ready

This is the phase you'll come back to again and again as your due date gets close. Know your signs, know your comfort measures, and know exactly what to do when the moment actually arrives.

KNOW YOUR SIGNS *How To Tell It's Actually Time*

SIGNS LABOR MAY BE STARTING

- [] Regular contractions that get stronger, longer, and closer together over time (not stop-and-start).
- [] Your water breaking, either a sudden gush or a slow trickle.
- [] Lower back pain or pressure that comes and goes in a pattern.

WHEN TO CALL YOUR PROVIDER

- [] Follow the timing guidance they gave you (often the 5-1-1 rule: contractions 5 minutes apart, lasting 1 minute, for 1 hour) — but always defer to what your specific provider told you.
- [] Call immediately if your water breaks, you notice heavy bleeding, or you feel reduced baby movement.
- [] When in doubt, call. It's always the right move.

COMFORT MEASURES *What Actually Helps During Contractions*

MOVEMENT & POSITION

- [] Walking, swaying, or rocking on a birthing ball to help labor progress and ease discomfort.
- [] Changing positions often — hands and knees, leaning forward, side-lying all take pressure off differently.
- [] A warm shower or bath, if your care setting allows it.

BREATHING & FOCUS

- [] Slow, deep breathing through each contraction, longer exhale than inhale.
- [] A focal point or visualization to concentrate on during the peak of a contraction.
- [] Your support person counting or breathing with you, so you're not doing it alone.

PHYSICAL COMFORT

- [] Counter-pressure on your lower back during contractions, especially helpful for back labor.
- [] A cool cloth for your forehead, or a warm compress on your lower back.
- [] Music or a calming playlist to help you relax between contractions.

REAL TALK

You don't need to use every technique in this guide. Try a few during pregnancy so you know what actually feels good to you — what works varies a lot from person to person.

FOR YOUR SUPPORT PERSON

How Your Partner Can Actually Help

Most partners want to help but don't know how. Share this page with them — it's the clearest, most useful list of what to actually do in the room.

- Track contraction timing so you don't have to think about it mid-contraction.
- Advocate for the birth plan if things get busy or overwhelming — be the calm, clear voice in the room.
- Offer counter-pressure, cool cloths, or whatever comfort measure you practiced together ahead of time.
- Handle logistics: bags, phone calls, parking, so you can stay focused on labor.
- Simply stay present. Often the most helpful thing is just being there, calm and attentive.

THE QUESTIONS YOU'RE AFRAID TO ASK

Common Fears, Answered Honestly

These are the worries almost every expecting mom has but doesn't always say out loud. Here's the honest, practical answer to each one.

THE FEAR	THE HONEST ANSWER
"What if my water breaks in public?"	It happens to fewer people than you'd think, and it's rarely a dramatic gush. Keep a small bag with a change of clothes in your car during your last few weeks if it eases your mind.
"What if my birth plan changes last minute?"	This is common, not a failure. Your birth plan is a guide for your team, not a rulebook you have to follow perfectly. Flexibility is part of being prepared, not the opposite of it.
"What if I need a C-section?"	About 1 in 3 births in the U.S. are C-sections. If yours becomes one, it doesn't mean anything went wrong with you — it means your team made the safest call for you and your baby.
"What if I don't make it to the hospital in time?"	This is rare, especially for first-time moms, since first labors tend to be longer. Knowing your signs and when to leave (covered in Phase 3) is your best protection against this fear.
"What if I panic and forget everything I learned?"	That's exactly why this guide exists as a printed reference, not just something you read once. Bring your one-page birth plan and comfort measures list with you — you don't have to remember it all from memory.

BEFORE YOU CLOSE THIS GUIDE

The Mindset Reset

Preparation matters, but so does how you carry yourself into the room. A few honest reminders for when the day actually comes.

- Your body has done the hardest parts of this already, for nine months, without you consciously doing anything.
- There is no "right" way to labor — loud, quiet, calm, emotional are all completely normal.
- Asking for pain relief, at any point, is not giving up. It's a valid choice, not a failure.
- The goal was never a perfect birth. It was walking in prepared, and walking out with your baby.

“You don't have to do this fearlessly. You just have to do it prepared.”

YOU ARE READY

Labor Day Isn't Something That Happens To You.

It's something you walk into, prepared, with a plan you understand and a team you trust. That's the whole point of this guide.

Keep this guide close over these last weeks. Come back to Phase 3 as your due date nears, and bring your birth plan and comfort measures list with you when the day comes.

LABOR READY