

How To Have A Mother-Friendly Birth

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When choosing your birth place and birth team, you might want to consider whether they are a "Mother-Friendly" birth practice. Much more than whether they are nice to you when you have appointments (which I hope they are!), "Mother-Friendly" is an approach to maternity care. The Mother-Friendly Childbirth Initiative (MFCI) is a 10-step evidence-based plan to help you have a safe and satisfying birth experience. Developed by The Coalition for Improving Maternity Services (CIMS), a coalition of individuals and national organizations with concern for the care and wellbeing of mothers, babies, and families. Their mission is to promote a wellness model of maternity care that will improve birth outcomes and substantially reduce costs. This evidence-based mother-, baby-, and family-friendly model focuses on prevention and wellness as the alternatives to high-cost screening, diagnosis, and treatment programs. It was ratified in July, 2006. Today, hospitals, birth centers, homebirth practices, and community-based organizations and clinics are working to implement Mother-Friendly Care in Los Angeles County, and throughout the U.S.



What does "Evidence-Based" Mean?

Evidence-Based means that the doctors, midwives and nurses involved in your care and the care of your newborn follow the most current scientific evidence which have been shown to have positive effects on mothers and babies. Sometimes, medical professionals will do what has become routine and customary rather than providing types of care that have been shown to be effective and do as little harm as possible. While there is always a time and place for every medical procedure, the care ought to be customized and individualized to each situation and woman or baby. Some examples of "routine" procedures without medical basis may be giving an intravenous fluid as part of admission to the hospital (rather than for a specific medical reason), or doing perineal massage during pregnancy (it does not help prevent tears during pushing), or artificially rupturing the membranes in labor (it may not speed up the labor or strengthen labor contractions, and may lead to the mother or baby getting an infection). Some medical procedures may be benign (not causing harm, but not necessarily beneficial), others may have potential harms.

So it is a good idea for expectant parents to learn about the Ten Steps of the Mother-Friendly Childbirth Initiative (MFCI), and what questions they should be asking their care providers before accepting or declining any procedures. It is best to find out the pros and cons and the effect on mother, baby, and labor before agreeing to have the procedure performed. Your health care provider should explain all of this to you in words you can understand, and not pressure you to make a particular choice, unless you or your baby is in serious danger. They should also allow you to make an informed refusal, including doing nothing, or choosing a completely different alternative. This is called Informed Consent and Refusal. It is your right to ask and to be informed and to give your permission to have a procedure done, or to refuse it.

Through these principles and steps, a woman can have a satisfying and safe birth experience. She can feel as if she is the center of her birth, and her desires and wishes are respected. She can achieve a sense of accomplishment and empowerment that will last an entire lifetime. This approach also will help her form a secure attachment to her baby, which is critical for that child's emotional development.

For more information on how to create a Mother-Friendly birth plan, contact The Association for Wholistic Maternal and Newborn Health, a community-based organization in Los Angeles offering childbirth preparation classes, labor doula support, postpartum doula support, breastfeeding support and referrals to Mother-Friendly providers. For more information on the Mother-Friendly Childbirth Initiative, including materials you can download, see: <http://motherfriendly.org>.

The MFCI is based on several principles. They are as follows:

The philosophical cornerstones of Mother-Friendly care are as follows:

- Normalcy of the Birthing Process
- Birth is a normal, natural, and healthy process.
- Women and babies have the inherent wisdom necessary for birth.
- Babies are aware, sensitive human beings at the time of birth, and should be acknowledged and treated as such.
- Breastfeeding provides the optimum nourishment for newborns and infants.
- Birth can safely take place in hospitals, birth centers, and homes.
- The midwifery model of care, which supports and protects the normal birth process, is the most appropriate for the majority of women during pregnancy and birth.

EMPOWERMENT

- A woman's confidence and ability to give birth and to care for her baby are enhanced or diminished by every person who gives her care, and by the environment in which she gives birth.
- A mother and baby are distinct yet interdependent during pregnancy, birth, and infancy. Their interconnectedness is vital and must be respected.
- Pregnancy, birth, and the postpartum period are milestone events in the continuum of life. These experiences profoundly affect women, babies, fathers, and families, and have important and long-lasting effects on society.

AUTONOMY

Every woman should have the opportunity to:

- Have a healthy and joyous birth experience for herself and her family, regardless of her age or circumstances;
- Give birth as she wishes in an environment in which she feels nurtured and secure, and her emotional well-being, privacy, and personal preferences are respected;
- Have access to the full range of options for pregnancy, birth, and nurturing her baby, and to accurate information on all available birthing sites, caregivers, and practices;
- Receive accurate and up-to-date information about the benefits and risks of all procedures, drugs, and tests suggested for use during pregnancy, birth, and the postpartum period, with the rights to informed consent and informed refusal;
- Receive support for making informed choices about what is best for her and her baby based on her individual values and beliefs.

DO NO HARM

- Interventions should not be applied routinely during pregnancy, birth, or the postpartum period. Many standard medical tests, procedures, technologies, and drugs carry risks to both mother and baby, and should be avoided in the absence of specific scientific indications for their use.
- If complications arise during pregnancy, birth, or the postpartum period, medical treatments should be evidence-based.

RESPONSIBILITY

- Each caregiver is responsible for the quality of care she or he provides.
- Maternity care practice should be based not on the needs of the caregiver or provider, but solely on the needs of the mother and child.
- Each hospital and birth center is responsible for the periodic review and evaluation, according to current scientific evidence, of the effectiveness, risks, and rates of use of its medical procedures for mothers and babies.
- Society, through both its government and the public health establishment, is responsible for ensuring access to maternity services for all women, and for monitoring the quality of those services.
- Individuals are ultimately responsible for making informed choices about the health care they and their babies receive.



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The Association for Wholistic Maternal and Newborn Health
Promoting Mother-Baby Friendly Maternity Care
Maternal-Child Health Education, Training, Consultation and Support