

Birth Preference Tips

Your birth preferences (also called a birth plan) must be read to be effective. To increase your chances of having the care you want from the hospital staff:

Keep it brief - list only what's most important to you -- choose your battles. Remember, you can refuse any intervention when it is offered -- just ask for a waiver.

Make it easy to read - avoid using a small font or handwriting unless your handwriting is clear and easy to read. Use bullet points and leave some white space. Print on colored paper to distinguish it from the white papers in your file.

Personalize it - attach a snapshot of you and your partner to the birth plan to identify who provided the food basket. If you've had other births, you should mention that experience, i.e., "My first birth was medically managed, so it's important to me to avoid interventions for this birth."

Make it relevant - if your hospital doesn't give enemas, don't tell them you don't want one. The nurses don't need to know that you want to labor at home for as long as possible.

Say it with food - nurses work long hours -- they always appreciate snacks. Your birth preferences, with its photo attached, will be read by every nurse at the station when presented with a small basket or gift bag of reasonably healthy snacks, such as cookies, fruit, crackers and cheese, nuts, etc. Chocolate can be included but there should be some nourishing food along with it. Fruit is also always welcome. Bring an additional basket or bag for the postpartum nurses, too!

Solicit their help - most doctors and nurses go into the health profession because they want to help. However, because they are in the medical profession, many of them have never seen a natural (unmedicated) birth, and they truly believe that the epidural, episiotomy, I.V., heparin, catheter, internal fetal monitor, etc. are all "helpful." Asking for their help in avoiding such interventions gives them a different perspective.

Keep it positive - try to avoid the words and phrases that include "no," or "don't." Find the positive side of what you want and say it that way. Saying "It's important to me to have the freedom to walk and change positions during my labor" will be respected more than "I don't want to have continuous fetal monitoring."

Keep it simple - "I am hoping to work with a nurse who believes in natural childbirth" and "I expect to actively participate in all decisions to ensure my ability to provide informed consent" are the types of simple statements that will get you what you want.