

PATHWAY TO A HEALTHY BIRTH

Helping Your Hormones Do Their Most Wonderful Work

IN HEALTHY PREGNANCIES, THE PATHWAY SHOWN HERE IS THE SAFEST, SMOOTHEST ROUTE FOR LABOR, BIRTH AND THE CRUCIAL DAYS THAT FOLLOW.

Staying on the right path means helping your body's natural hormones work well for you!

DURING PREGNANCY

- Pregnancy is a time to plan for safe, smooth childbirth
- Low levels of stress hormones help you and your baby stay healthy¹

LATE PREGNANCY

- Hormones prepare you for safe and smooth childbirth, breastfeeding, and bonding³

WHAT WILL HELP YOU STAY ON THE PATHWAY?

WHAT CAN PULL YOU AWAY FROM THE PATHWAY?

- ✓ Choose the care provider and birth place that support your body's abilities while avoiding unneeded tests and treatments
- ✓ Find a doula to help you stay comfortable and calm while you give birth²
- ✓ Limit stress during pregnancy when possible¹

- ✗ Choosing the care provider and birth place that intervene in natural processes when you and your baby are healthy
- ✗ Not having skilled, personalized support while giving birth
- ✗ Feeling stressed during pregnancy

WHAT WILL HELP YOU STAY ON THE PATHWAY?

WHAT CAN PULL YOU AWAY FROM THE PATHWAY?

- ✓ Let labor begin on its own when possible

- ✗ Inducing labor⁴ (or having a cesarean) before your body is ready to give birth and your baby is ready to be born

ACTIVE LABOR

- Hormones prepare you for a safe birth and the time after birth⁷
- Hormones help avoid unneeded interventions and side effects

EARLY LABOR

- Hormones prepare you for a smooth labor and birth⁵
- Hormones help avoid unneeded interventions and side effects

WHAT WILL HELP YOU STAY ON THE PATHWAY?

WHAT CAN PULL YOU AWAY FROM THE PATHWAY?

- ✓ Use comfort measures such as tubs, showers, and birth balls
- ✓ Stay upright and move around for good labor progress; be patient during labor
- ✓ Stay calm and relaxed

- ✗ Getting an epidural may slow your labor and make pushing difficult⁸
- ✗ Getting synthetic oxytocin ("Pitocin") to strengthen your labor can interfere with your body's hormones⁴
- ✗ Feeling stressed or anxious

WHAT CAN PULL YOU AWAY FROM THE PATHWAY?

WHAT WILL HELP YOU STAY ON THE PATHWAY?

- ✗ Going to the hospital early before labor is strong ("active" labor)⁶
- ✗ Feeling stressed or anxious can slow down labor

- ✓ Stay home until labor is strong ("active" labor), while staying in touch with your care provider
- ✓ Stay calm and relaxed, and get support from a doula²

EARLY HOURS AND FIRST DAYS AFTER BIRTH

- Hormones help you and your baby feel calm, connected, and ready to breastfeed⁹

WHAT WILL HELP YOU STAY ON THE PATHWAY?

WHAT CAN PULL YOU AWAY FROM THE PATHWAY?

- ✓ Stay in skin-to-skin contact with your baby in the hours after birth¹⁰
- ✓ Breastfeed soon after birth and when your baby seems interested in feeding¹²
- ✓ Limit distractions, stay calm, and focus on being with your baby in the days after birth¹³

- ✗ Being separated from your baby after birth¹¹
- ✗ Not breastfeeding shortly after birth and when your baby is interested in feeding
- ✗ Being distracted with other people and activities in the days after birth

If you or your baby need special medical care, you are likely to benefit from the checked practices whenever possible.

Learn more about the pathway to a healthy birth in a booklet made just for women at

ChildbirthConnection.org/BirthPathway

These recommendations are based on the research summarized in *Hormonal Physiology of Childbearing: Evidence and Implications for Women, Babies, and Maternity Care* by Sarah J. Buckley. Available with full extensive references at ChildbirthConnection.org/HormonalPhysiology

This information is not intended to be a substitute for the professional guidance of qualified health care providers.

Selected References

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