



What is a Doula?

Doula is a Greek word meaning “woman’s servant”. She was likely the woman who helped the lady of the house through her childbearing year.

Today ‘**birth doula**’ refers to a woman experienced in childbirth who provides continuous physical, emotional and informational support to the mother and her partner(s) before, during and just after childbirth.

A ‘**postpartum doula**’ can help after the baby is born. She is experienced in mother and newborn care, breastfeeding support, and can assist with errands, childcare and light housekeeping.

Current research has shown us that using a professional birth doula during labour provides the following benefits:

- shorter labours
- fewer complications
- reduction in cesarean rates
- reduction in oxytocin use
- reduction in forceps use
- reduction in epidural requests
- reduction in analgesia use

For the mothers:

- greater satisfaction with their birth experience
- more positive assessments of their babies
- less postpartum depression

For the babies:

- Shorter hospital stays with fewer admissions to special care nurseries
- Babies breastfeed more easily
- Mothers are more affectionate

* Information was obtained from the [DONA website](#).

What does a birth doula do?

Doulas do not provide you with any clinical care, so they do not replace your doctor or midwife. Generally your relationship with your doula will begin during pregnancy. As you discuss the priorities you have for your upcoming birth, your doula will help you find ways of obtaining your goals. This may be in the form of finding the appropriate childbirth class, accessing accurate information, learning and practising techniques for labour, and assisting with writing a birth plan, if desired.

The doula joins the mother and other support people when they feel the need for extra support. She goes with them to their place of birth and stays until after the baby is born.

Doulas are proficient in massage, positioning, comfort measures, relaxation and breathing techniques. They will help you and your partner decide which position will help labour along or make labour more comfortable. Along the way she will make suggestions and reminders about simple things that are often forgotten, like going to the bathroom, or drinking fluids. A doula will usually take notes and photographs, if you would like to have some taken.

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Your doula will help you remember what plans you had for labour and help you get the things that you wanted. She can also assist you when changes need to be made or complications arise.

After your baby is born she can help you with early breastfeeding and postpartum issues. Over the next few important days the doula will keep in touch by phone, and make an appointment to visit again in order to review the labour and birth with you.

Do partners feel left out?

No! Doulas do not replace the father in any way. Doulas usually take a very quiet support role, often letting the couple work together while she does other things like massage, fetching ice chips, preparing the shower, or occasionally making suggestions.

It is often forgotten that dads are experiencing this labour too and have an emotional investment. Some have a hard time remembering what was taught in class, some may not have attended classes. A doula can help the father experience this special time with confidence.

With her partner and a doula at birth a mother can have the best of both worlds: her partner's loving care and attention and the doula's expertise and guidance in childbirth.

Who needs a doula?

Anyone having a baby can benefit from a birth doula. Some people believe that doulas are only for women who want an unmedicated birth. This is not true. Doulas have very important roles to play in medicated and surgical births too.

Women who are planning a natural birth often do hire doulas to help increase their support team, as do women desiring a vaginal birth after a previous cesarean. High risk mothers often feel the need to have someone take care of their family emotionally, while they are receiving the best in high technological care from their clinical staff. Single mothers may choose a doula if they lack support from their family or friends.

What does a post-partum Doula do?

- Dedicates herself to mothering the mother.
- Helps her meet the physical, emotional and social needs following birth.
- Provides education, non-judgmental support, and companionship, to assist with newborn care (i.e. breastfeeding support), family adjustment, meal preparation and light household tasks.
- Offers evidence-based information on infant feeding, emotional and physical recovery from childbirth, infant soothing and coping skills for new parents and can make appropriate referrals when necessary.
- Validates and enhances the parents' intuitive ability to nurture and encourages them to develop and implement their own parenting style.
- Enhances communication both within the family and with other support professionals.
- Promotes parent-infant bonding.
- Stays with each family vary as there is no precise time frame for postpartum support.

How can I find a doula?

There are many ways to find both birth and postpartum doulas, and you could begin on the Internet. Call [local doula association] referral lines, pick up a copy of *Birthing Magazine*, and ask your friends and acquaintances. You'd be surprised how many people have now heard of doulas and even used a doula. Interview a few doulas to find someone you are

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comfortable with and who you feel will work well with you and your partner. You may not feel comfortable with the first doula you meet -- don't worry, nobody will take it personally!

(Adapted from the website www.calgarydoulas.ca)

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