



Dear Expectant Parent,

At Virtua, we hope that your birth be the positive, memorable experience that you are anticipating. Our goal is to promote the health and well-being of both mom and baby through the delivery of high quality maternity care. Your physician will lead the health care team to assure that every decision is made with that goal in mind. Our doctors, nurses and childbirth educators work collaboratively with expectant families and their support teams to prepare them for this wonderful event.

As you plan for the big day, here are some tips to help you get ready:

**Birth plans** – Many expectant mothers ask if they should create a birth plan. The following information helps answer that question.

A birth plan is a simple, one-page statement of your preferences for the birth of your baby. We respect your thoughts and feelings regarding your birth experience and your right to create a formalized birth plan if you so desire. We encourage you to discuss this with your care providers.

Here are some things you should know:

- The appropriate time for sharing your desires for your birth is during your pregnancy. If you want to develop a 'plan' for your birth experience, do so with your doctor/midwife during your monthly appointments.
- While it is very helpful to your care team to know what your thoughts and preferences are, there is no substitute for the medical expertise of your doctor/midwife. You probably spent a lot of time in choosing the right doctor/midwife for you, and as a result, have confidence in his/her ability to provide you with the highest quality of care.

- Birth plans, however well thought out, cannot anticipate all the possibilities that accompany the birth experience. As a result, a birth plan that cannot be fulfilled may lead to feelings of disappointment and failure. Consider keeping a journal or notes about your preferences and take time to share them with your caregivers as you go through your pregnancy.
- Remember to be flexible as you look toward your labor and birth. Keep in mind that we all share the common goal – a safe experience for you and your baby. Flexibility will be essential as you begin your new parenting journey!

**Doulas** – A doula is someone who is trained to give non-medical assistance to a woman during labor; she provides emotional and physical support throughout the process of childbirth. Some women choose to have a doula with them when they give birth.

Things to know:

- If you choose to have a doula attend your birth, she will be one of the three members of your support team who may be with you during your labor and birth.
- The doula's role is to provide comfort and emotional support; she will not and cannot perform medical tasks such as taking your blood pressure, monitoring your baby's heart rate, or doing vaginal examinations.
- Decisions about your medical care will be made by you and your doctor/midwife and nurses. Doulas do not have the training to appropriately guide your medical care.
- If you are considering having a doula as part of your support team, talk to your doctor/midwife or your childbirth education instructor. They may be able to give you names of doulas that have attended births at Virtua in the past.
- Doulas charge for their services and you can expect to pay anywhere from \$400-\$700. Check with your insurance to see if there is any coverage for this service.

**Childbirth education classes** – With the amount of information now available on the Internet, in books and on television, many expectant couples are uncertain about whether or not they should attend childbirth classes to prepare for their birth.

Things to consider:

- The source of the information you are accessing:
  - Who is the provider of the information?
  - Is the information based on medical evidence?
  - Does it address your questions and concerns?
  - Do you feel prepared for your birth experience as a result of the information provided?
- Virtua's childbirth educators are labor and delivery/mother-baby nurses, lactation consultants and trained educators with expertise in the areas of birth and child care. They have years of experience working at Virtua alongside the doctors, midwives and nurses that will be caring for you. As a result, they can prepare you like no one else for what to expect when having a baby at Virtua.
- Virtua offers two options for those who are interested in a 'natural' approach to giving birth in our classes:
  - *Labor Basics* is a two night class that will teach you all about labor and birth and includes information on Cesarean section, epidurals and the postpartum experience.
  - *Breathing and Relaxation* is a one-night class that teaches you breathing, relaxation and massage techniques to help you manage the birth experience.
- If you are unable to attend classes in person, an online *Labor Basics* option is available with e-mail access to our childbirth educators who will answer your questions in a timely manner.
- [Find a class that's right for you.](#)