

Choosing A Home Birth Midwife

by Megan Reynolds

Finding a good birth attendant is the cornerstone to a successful home birth. Choosing a midwife is a very personal process. This woman will be with you during the most empowering yet vulnerable time of your life. She will be a person to whom you bare all. She will remain in a special part of your heart. For this to happen she must be someone whom you feel safe with and trust.

"The most important decision that you will make in this whole grand adventure of pregnancy and birth is your choice of birth attendant."

- Andrea Eastman, MA, CCE, IBCLC (Childbirth educator and lactation consultant)

In Canterbury we are blessed with a good number of midwives who are happy to attend births at home. Some are dedicated homebirth midwives, while others offer midwifery care at whatever venue the birthing woman chooses. Although you 'sign up' with a midwife LMC (lead maternity carer) in the first part of your pregnancy, this does not bind you to that midwife and you are free to change LMC at any stage. I changed LMC late in my first pregnancy as my initial midwife seemed to doubt my ability as a first-timer to birth at home. It is almost never too late to change midwives and getting a new birth attendant at 30 plus weeks is not rare. However the sooner you find a midwife you are happy with the better, because most midwives limit the number of women they care for in a month and are often quickly fully booked. I would encourage any woman to change midwife if she was not happy with her initial choice. After all, birth is a major life event and both mother and baby deserve excellent midwifery care.

So you have contemplated home as a birth venue and now you need to find a professional to help this dream become a reality. How do you go about finding the midwife of your dreams? Go to the Midwifery Resource Centre to check out which midwives offer homebirth. Ask friends if they would recommend their midwife. Contact a Home Birth Association member (see front of 'Birthplace' for phone numbers) – we are more than happy to make recommendations. However at the end of the day you have to feel confident that this is the midwife for you and the only way to find this out is to meet and/or talk with her.

It is a good idea to interview more than one midwife or midwifery practice (see back of 'Birthplace' for details of Home Birth Information Evenings). Most midwives will be happy

to meet with you and discuss their philosophy and answer any questions you may have. The following are a series of questions which you may want to ask a prospective midwife. This list isn't exhaustive and many questions you have may be specific to your situation i.e. siblings being present, videoing the birth, distance from hospital etc. Ask whatever is important to you.

1. What is your philosophy about childbirth? Why did you become a midwife?
2. How long have you been practising and how many births have you been the primary midwife responsible? How many of those births were at home?
3. How did you receive your training? ie Direct entry midwifery or Registered nurse.
4. When did you last participate in Midwifery Standards Review process? What was the outcome?
5. Will you have other clients around the time my baby is due? (The New Zealand College of Midwives recommends a midwife take a maximum of five women due per month) What happens if you are with another client when I go into labour?
6. At what point during my labour will you come to my house? What will you do if my labour is progressing slowly? What happens if it's so fast you miss the birth? Have you ever missed a birth? Why?
7. Who is your back-up midwife and when will I meet her? Will I have the opportunity to get to know her before my baby is due?
8. Do you have midwifery students working with you? Will I be able to get to know her before my birth? What happens if I don't want one of them, or prefer one of them at my birth?
9. What emergency equipment and medications do you carry? When will you use the following: syntometrine, newborn resuscitation equipment, oxygen, suturing materials, IVs, saline?
10. Are you certified to continue care in hospital if I need an epidural?
11. How will you monitor the well-being of my baby and me during labour?
12. What is your policy regarding episiotomies? What is your episiotomy rate? What is your rate of tears or intact perineums? What happens if my perineum needs stitching?

13. Are there any drug-free techniques you provide for pain relief during labour?
14. Under what circumstances do you recommend transfer to hospital? What percentage of your clients need to transfer to hospital? What would be the plan of action if a transfer to hospital were necessary? What care would you give me if I need to transfer?
15. Under what circumstances would you consider me too high risk for homebirth?
16. Where do you conduct antenatal visits? How long do you give each woman? What is discussed? What is done?
17. How long will you stay after the baby's birth?
18. How many postnatal visits will we have?
19. Do you work closely with any doctors? Why? If you do — who are they? When can I meet them during the pregnancy?
20. Do you offer childbirth classes? If not, what classes are available?
21. Can you recommend appropriate books, videos, internet sites etc for my pregnancy? Who else can I speak to?
22. Are you comfortable with waterbirths should I decide to labour or birth in water? How many waterbirths have you done at home? In hospital?
23. Do you have information on the pros and cons of giving vitamin K and on childhood vaccinations?

For many women, home is their first choice to bring their baby into the world. If you have a strong inner commitment to giving birth at home, are healthy with a positive outlook on your life, and have a midwife you feel comfortable with and trust, you will have all the necessary things to make home birth an experience worth repeating!

