



SUPPORTING WOMEN  
THROUGH INFORMED  
CONCEPTION, PREGNANCY,  
BIRTH & BREASTFEEDING.

INFOSHEETS

# GIVING BIRTH IN INDIA

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## Introduction

Not all services currently available in India are ideal. Some of the following consumer information may be confronting, if you need support, please contact one of the mother's groups, midwives or doulas listed in our service directory or email [info@birthindia.org](mailto:info@birthindia.org)

When women are not treated with respect and dignity, when they are treated as a commodity, when their human rights are violated, they are in fact not safe.

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*“It is now accurate to say that many interventions and medications used in birth are used routinely or frequently in spite of research that has clearly shown that they are being used inappropriately.” - Judith Pence Rooks.*

In the last decade in India, we have seen a few new options in maternal care; including doulas, birth centres, hypnobirthing, lactation consultants and home birth with a certified midwife. The two main birthing options available in India are the medical model and home birth with a traditional birth attendant. In the medical model mother's birth in the hospital with a Gynaecologist/ Obstetrician and Obstetric Nurses. Studies state India's private hospitals caesarean rate at 65%; anecdotal evidence from hospital administrators and consumer societies put some Dr's and hospital caesarean rates at 98% the World Health Organisation recommends optimal rates of 5-15%. Additionally many women birthing vaginally will receive an unnecessary routine episiotomy. You and your newborn baby are likely to be exposed to unnecessary procedures, treatments, medications and interventions in pregnancy and birth. Even in hospitals and clinics that are aesthetically appealing, offer water birth as well as state of the art technology. If you want or need interventions or surgery most of the big hospitals are well equipped and the doctors are skilled. However, considering that you are likely to birth either medically or via caesarean, you may like to find a surgeon that favours motherbaby friendly caesareans.

Nurses may not let you bath or change your baby. Formula and top-up feeds are common. If you want to breastfeed, you will need to discuss breastfeeding friendly practices with your care provider as many of the practices in Indian hospitals negatively impact successful breastfeeding. Discuss placing baby directly on the breast at birth, delayed cord cutting, bathing is delayed and formula is not given. It is also common practice to be given strong sleeping pills and pain medication, in this case, the baby will need to be away from you and fed formula. There can be a lack of autonomy, privacy with non-essential personnel in the room, bright lights, rude behavior from staff and general disregard. If you are looking for care that is more in line with evidence-based practice, mother-baby friendly care, breastfeeding friendly care and women's birthing rights, consider some of the new options available.

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## **Birth in hospital with a Doctor and Waterbirth, Doula and Hypnobirthing**

A few doctors are open to working with privately hired doulas, midwives, and hypnobirthing practitioners. Some offer water birth and some offer their services as a backup for a home birth. Additionally some support VBAC (vaginal birth after caesarean surgery), natural twin, and breech birth. When mothers take a doula or midwife with them, these doctors have lower unnecessary intervention rates and the birth experience is more in line with evidence-based practice, birthing rights, and mother-baby friendly practices. For example, it is more likely that these doctors when a doula or midwife is present acknowledge gestation as 42/43 weeks and are more likely to avoid unnecessary medical intervention including, overuse of sonography, artificially starting (induction) or speeding up labour (augmentation), episiotomy, continuous foetal monitoring, immediate cord clamping and separating the Mother and Baby immediately after birth. Additionally they are less dictatorial and value your knowledge, beliefs and input. They are also more likely to support birthing in-room in an atmosphere of the mother's choice.

**However, be aware that the practices of these doctors and hospitals can be very different when autonomous midwives or doulas are not present. Also, be aware that it is a difficult environment for your midwife or doula as they are in not control. They can help you advocate for yourself but they can not control things for you.** Apart from the two birthing centres in India (not located in Mumbai) all nursing homes and hospitals in India are staffed by obstetric nurses and obstetricians. **Choosing a place to birth is no different to buying a phone, house or car, meet at least three doctors before making a decision. Also, talk to at least three women who have had the kind of experience you desire with that doctor.**

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## Home Birth

Home births are increasing every year due to an increasing awareness of the research that supports the safety of homebirth and the health benefits of natural birth to mother and child; women employ foreign midwives who reside in india, or they hire them from Asia or as far as Europe and America. Home births are more likely to be natural, mother is in control of her body and is able to follow the cues of her baby and body, birth proceeds as it was intended. They take place in a loving and supportive environment; they involve far fewer interventions and trauma to mother and baby than vaginal hospital births, additionally breastfeeding rates are higher. Contact your local midwife to talk about home birth and to meet other mums who have birthed at home. A few doctors are happy to support and backup for home birth mothers.

## Birth Centres

*A Birth Centre is run by autonomous midwives who are in charge of birth, and there is no outside interference. Birth Centres are not places where administrators, insurance companies, surgeons/ obstetricians or obstetric nurses are in charge. Birth Centres have very high success rates for natural birth, breastfeeding, vaginal birth after caesarean section (VBAC), natural twin birth and natural breech birth. They also have low rates of medical interventions, including Caesarean section and episiotomy. Birth Centres follow motherbaby friendly practices some of which include; support to birth normally, freedom to move and birth in a position of your choice, eating and drinking during labor, immediate direct skin to skin contact between mother and baby and delayed cord cutting.*

There are only two Birthing Centres in India and some mothers travel from far to avail their services:

### **Birthvillage Natural Birthing Center, Cochin**

An Independent, free-standing birth centre. The mother is in the care of one midwife throughout her pregnancy, birth and postpartum period. They have an arrangement with local hospitals should the need to transfer a mother arise.

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## **Healthy Mother Sanctum, Hyderabad**

Located in a building that also houses a hospital. This Birth centre maintains autonomy and independence from the hospital and is owned and run by autonomous midwives. The centre is independent of the hospital, but not free-standing. The hospital doctors and facilities are employed by the birth centre when required. Midwives are in charge. The surgeries and neonatal units in this type of centre are close.

## **Water Birth Hospitals**

Be aware that a nursing home, hospital or maternity ward offering water birth and or are supportive of hypnobirthing are not birth centres. Many common practices remain including inserting an IV, separating the baby from the mother at birth, giving the newborn milk formula and instant cord clamping. As well as high rates of medical interventions that often exceed medical recommendations; including excessive sonographies, caesarean, episiotomy, induction and augmentation and placing newborns in NICU. If the hospital does not support mothers who want to bring their midwife or doula into their facility, they do not follow mother-baby friendly birth practices.

## **Midwifery**

There is a difference between obstetric nurses working in a hospital who are being promoted as midwives and autonomous midwives. Autonomous midwives are trained to support normal birth independently and detect problems as they arise. They follow the Midwifery Model of Care, which includes an extensive clinical training, women's birthing rights, evidence-based practice, and mother-baby friendly practice. Nurse midwives or obstetric nurses are not highly skilled clinicians, or encouraged as autonomous professionals, they are trained to support the medical model and follow the orders of the doctor.

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## Mother Baby Friendly Hospitals

There is a recent wave of “mother –friendly” boutique hospitals and individual doctors in large hospitals who have reputations for being ‘pro-natural birth’. However proceed with caution and be guided by midwives, doulas or consumer groups who know specific information about the nursing home / hospital. When the mother is accompanied by a doula, midwife or hypnobirthing practitioner, these nursing homes often uphold a higher standard more in line with motherbaby friendly practices'. However, these doctors and hospitals’ practices can be very different when autonomous midwives or doulas are not present.

### IMPORTANT INFORMATION

*Be aware of hospitals, nursing homes and maternity wards referring to their service as “A Birthing Centre”, “Mother-Baby Friendly”, “Well Women Care” and also as “Midwifery Care”. These labels are often marketing and not a true representation of services offered, in the absence of regulation, unfortunately, doctors and administrators are behaving in a fraudulent and unsafe manner. Additionally do not trust the testimonials given on social media as they are often written by administrators or doctors and not the parent/clients. Speak to parents directly who have used the service. Many hospitals in India are now under strict control by insurance companies that govern what Doctors practise, for example, permitted time of labor. These rules often have nothing to do with safety or evidence-based medicine.*

**Tips to avoid medical interventions** : please go to our downloads for the full list of top tips

Natural birth is a normal state for women, stay calm women’s bodies can birth, you can do it.

- Chose independent childbirth educators they are not dictated to by Doctors.

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- Avoid hospitals and nursing homes that also promote IVF, cord banking, hysterectomies and cosmetic surgery.
  - Ask mothers and support practitioners about the different doctors available.
  - Wait upto 4 weeks for labor to start naturally.
  - Stay at home until labour is well established.
  - Avoid sonographies in the last trimester
  - Avoid unnecessary Induction
  - Avoid an epidural
  - Avoid continuous foetal monitoring
  - Eat, drink, rest and move around during labour. Listen to your body.
  - Hire a doula or midwife to support you.
  - Consider home birth or birthing at a Birth Centre.
  - Don't hesitate to change care providers even a the last minute if you become uncomfortable.
  - Be prepared to travel vast distances to get the birth that you want.
  - Avoid anything that makes you feel stressed or uncomfortable, even if that means abandoning your ideas about the birth you wanted.

## **Tips for Successful Breastfeeding**

- Is the baby put directly to the breast?
- Is delayed cord cutting the norm?
- What breastfeeding support is offered?
- Join La Leche League and a mothers group before your baby is born.

**You can birth your baby; you deserve to do so with  
dignity, love and support.**

