



Practical Tips for an Empowered Birth Experience



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WELCOME

Hello, I'm your Full Spectrum Doula, Kat Thompson.

Hey there,

Whether you're eagerly counting down the days or still trying to wrap your head around the fact that birth is even happening (is it just me, or do nine months fly by and drag all at once?), you're in the right place.

This little guide was created for anyone who's wondering:
"How do I actually prepare for this?"

There's no one-size-fits-all birth experience. No single "right" way to cope. No gold star for how you labour or what you choose – but you do deserve to feel informed, respected, and supported every step of the way.

And that's what this freebie is about: giving you just enough insight to feel more grounded and more in control of your birth experience – without overwhelming you with the stuff that's better talked through one-on-one.



I've worked with all kinds of births – planned and unplanned, fast and slow, medicated and not – and I can tell you this: the difference often comes down to how supported a birthing person feels. When you feel safe, heard, and cared for, your experience shifts.

So take a deep breath. This is your space to explore, learn, and get curious about what matters to you.

I'm so glad you're here.

- Kat Thompson



CHAPTER I

Know Your Options, Know Your Power

Your Birth Plan: Not a Script, But a Conversation Starter

A birth plan isn't about controlling every moment, it's about communicating what matters to you. Think of it as a flexible roadmap that helps your care team understand your values, preferences, and boundaries.

Start with these 5 prompts:

- What kind of environment helps you feel safe (dim lights? quiet room?)
- How do you feel about pain medication or unmedicated birth?
- Who do you want in the room – and who don't you?
- Are there any cultural, spiritual, or personal practices you want respected?
- What kind of support will help you feel emotionally grounded?

Tip: Review your plan with your doula, OB or midwife. Their input can help align your hopes with medical realities – and help you advocate effectively.

Comfort & Coping Tools: It's Not Just Breathing

Coping strategies are more than “just breathe” – they're ways to move through labour, not escape it. The more tools you have, the more adaptable you'll be.

A few effective options:

- **Movement & Positioning:** Gravity helps! Sway, squat, rock, lean.
- **Touch & Massage:** Counterpressure, hip squeezes, foot rubs.
- **Hydrotherapy:** Warm water can ease tension. Shower or tub.
- **Mind Tricks:** Focal points, affirmations, counting, visualization.
- **Sound & Breath:** Low moans, deep exhales, patterned breathing.

These don't just help you – they also guide your birth partner or doula in how to support you best.

CHAPTER I

Know Your Options, Know Your Power

Your Birth Support Team: You Deserve a Village

Your birth team can make or break your experience – so build one that feels good to you.

- **OB or Midwife:** Offers medical care, monitors safety, leads interventions.
- **Doula:** Provides emotional, physical, and informational support. We're your anchor.
- **Partner or Support Person:** A familiar face, offering love and presence.
- **Nurse or Student Practitioner:** They'll support you day-of, especially in hospital settings.

Not everyone is a good fit for your team – and that's okay.

You're allowed to choose who makes you feel safe, seen, and heard. And if that changes during labour? ***That's okay too.***

You can let your doula, care provider, or partner know that someone's presence no longer feels supportive...even if it's your parent, partner, a nurse...or yes, even your doula.

This is your birth space and your comfort comes first!



CHAPTER II

Preparing

Mental Health

Mental wellness during pregnancy is just as important as physical health and it doesn't get talked about enough. Anxiety, depression, and mood swings are all valid experiences, and prenatal depression can begin before baby arrives. Birth trauma can also begin as early as the first prenatal appointment, especially when care feels rushed or dismissive.

Tips:

- Track your mood regularly with a journal or mood tracker.
- Talk to your care provider about any emotional changes, no concern is too small.
- Consider a doula or therapist who is trauma-informed and perinatal-trained.
- Learn the signs of perinatal mood disorders early, so your support team can help.

You deserve compassionate, affirming support throughout your entire journey, not just during labour.

Physical Health

As your body grows and changes, so do your needs. Staying active, nourished, and tuned in helps you feel more confident and connected. No, you don't need to "train" for birth – but you can prepare in ways that feel good to you.

Ideas to consider:

- Gentle movement (prenatal yoga, walking, pelvic floor work).
- Nourishing foods and mindful hydration.
- Bone broth – a mineral-rich, warming food that supports the uterus and digestion.
- Rest when your body asks for it. That's part of training, too.

Your physical strength will show up in ways you might not expect.



CHAPTER II

Preparing

Partner Prep

Your partner (or chosen support person) is part of this journey too. They may need guidance, clarity, and practical tools to help you during labour. That's where prenatal education and doula prep sessions come in handy.

Partner can support you by:

- Practicing comfort measures (counterpressure, breathing, etc.).
- Learning about the stages of labour and when to call for help.
- Acting as your advocate when you need time, space, or calm.
- Being emotionally present – reassurance can be powerful.

Not every partner feels confident from day one but with the right tools, they can become a calm, supportive force during your birth.

Birth Bag

Your birth bag is your little comfort kit. It doesn't need to be fancy or huge, it just needs to include what makes you feel calm, cozy, and capable.

Include things like:

- Lip balm, hair ties, and cozy socks.
- Snacks and drinks for both of you.
- A speaker or playlist for music.
- Your birth plan and copies for your team.
- A rebozo or comfort tool, if you're using one.

And don't forget a phone charger.

Seriously.

Home Prep (Meals, Bedroom, Sleep Space)

Before baby arrives, setting up your space with care can reduce stress later.

Ideas for nesting:

- Prep and freeze easy, nourishing meals (or ask your doula about postpartum meal support!).
- Set up a cozy sleeping space with low light and snacks within reach.
- Wash and organize baby clothes, diapers, and burp cloths.
- Create a calm corner for feeding and bonding.

You don't have to be ready – just supported. That's what matters.

CHAPTER II

Preparing

The BRAIN Tool – Making Informed Decisions in Labour

The BRAIN acronym is a simple yet powerful tool for making informed decisions during pregnancy, labour, and even postpartum. It's especially helpful when you're being asked to consent to a medical procedure or make a quick choice in the moment.

What does BRAIN stand for?

- **Benefits:** What are the benefits of this procedure, intervention, or choice?
- **Risks:** What are the possible risks (short or long-term)?
- **Alternatives:** Are there any other options or approaches we can consider?
- **Intuition:** What does your gut say? What feels right or wrong in your body?
- **Nothing:** What happens if we wait or do nothing right now?

When might you use BRAIN?

Here are a few real-life examples where you (or your partner) might pause and use BRAIN to advocate for your preferences:

1. "We'd like to break your water to speed things up."

- B – May help contractions become stronger and speed labour.
- R – Increased risk of infection, loss of cushion for baby, potential need for more interventions.

- A – Wait a bit longer, change positions, use natural methods to encourage labour.
- I – "It doesn't feel right to interfere right now."
- N – Nothing happens; labour might progress on its own.

2. "We'd like to start Pitocin (Oxytocin) to augment your labour."

- B – Can increase contraction strength and help move labour forward.
- R – Stronger, more painful contractions, increased risk of fetal distress, higher chance of needing pain relief or C-section.
- A – Try nipple stimulation, upright movement, or hydration.
- I – "I want to try everything else first before medication."
- N – Continue labouring as is and reassess in 1–2 hours.

3. Partner Use Case:

"Do you want to continue pushing in this position or try another?"

- B – Trying a new position may help baby descend faster.
- R – May be more physically demanding.
- A – Stay where you are, try a peanut ball or hands-and-knees.
- I – "They looked exhausted – maybe rest is better."
- N – Stick with current plan, revisit in 10 minutes.

CHAPTER III

Health Care Options

What model of care fits you best?

Obstetricians (OBs)

- OBs are specialists in high-risk pregnancies and medicalized births. You'll likely see them in clinics or hospitals.
- They're trained to manage complications like C-sections, multiples, or high blood pressure.
- OB care can sometimes feel more clinical and less relational – you might not know which OB will be on call at your birth unless you're with a private group.

Best for those with complex pregnancies or who prefer hospital-based, medically focused care.

Midwives

- Midwives are registered medical professionals who support low-risk pregnancies using a holistic, client-centered model of care.
- Appointments are often longer (30–60 minutes), with time to ask questions, build trust, and explore your choices.
- In Alberta, midwifery is covered by Alberta Health Services, but demand is high, so apply early.

Midwifery care is ideal if you're seeking continuity, shared decision-making, and a more natural approach.

Shared Care

- This model combines both OB and midwife/family doctor care, common in rural areas or when transitioning between levels of risk.
- You might have prenatal visits with a GP or midwife, and an OB will take over if complications arise.

Helpful if you want options or anticipate needing a collaborative approach between providers.

Doulas (Like Me!)

- Doulas are non-medical professionals who offer emotional, physical, and informational support during pregnancy, birth, and postpartum.
- We don't replace your doctor or midwife – we complement them by making sure you feel seen, heard, and empowered.
- Doulas support all kinds of births: unmedicated, medicated, VBAC, cesarean, hospital, birth centre, home, and even freebirth.
- Unlike medical providers, I stay with you throughout your labour and birth, offering tools, comfort, advocacy, and calm.

I meet you wherever you're at in your journey – no judgment, just continuous, personalized care.

CHAPTER III

Health Care Options

Hospital, Home, Birth Centre, or Freebirth

- **Hospital Birth:** Most common option, especially for those working with OBs. Medical staff and equipment are readily available.
- **Home Birth:** Midwife-attended births at home offer a familiar, relaxed environment. Midwives bring emergency supplies and only proceed if you're low risk.
- **Birth Centre:** A blend of comfort and clinical support, these facilities (like the Calgary Birth Centre) provide midwife-led, home-like birth in a standalone facility.

- **Freebirth (Unassisted Birth):**

Chosen by some for personal, cultural, or trauma-informed reasons. This option should include careful planning and understanding of risks.

No matter where you give birth, your comfort, agency, and informed consent matter most. If your circumstances change, so can your plan.



CHAPTER IV

Common Challenges & How to Handle Them

You're not alone – and you're not doing it wrong.

“Am I in labour... or not?”

It's one of the most common questions, especially in first-time births. Early labour can mimic Braxton Hicks, and it can take hours (or even days) before active labour begins.

Tip: If contractions are irregular or ease up with rest, hydration, or a warm bath, you might still be in early labour. Try to rest, eat, and conserve your energy.

Feeling overstimulated or overwhelmed

Noise, bright lights, too many people – it can all feel like too much during labour. Your senses are heightened, and you might become more introverted or protective.

Tip: Let your team know what sensory triggers to avoid. Use dim lighting, soothing sounds, and create a safe “bubble” with a trusted support person.

Advocating for yourself when it's hard

Whether it's pressure to induce, constant cervical checks, or feeling unheard, medical spaces can be intimidating.

Tip: Use the BRAIN tool (Benefits, Risks, Alternatives, Intuition, Nothing) to slow things down. Ask for time to think. Ask your doula or partner to speak up for you if you can't.

When labour doesn't go to plan

Maybe your “dream birth” was a water birth, and now you're being induced. Or maybe you planned for an epidural-free birth but asked for one halfway through.

Tip: Your plan isn't a failure – it's a guide, not a promise. Changing your mind is not weakness – it's wisdom. Your choices are still your choices.

When you no longer want someone in the room

Feelings can shift quickly in labour. You might love someone dearly – but in the moment, their energy may not feel right.

Tip: You're allowed to say no. You can ask someone to leave the room, even if it's your partner, parent, nurse, or even your doula. You deserve to feel safe, not guilty.

Mental health before birth

Postpartum depression can start before birth – and birth trauma can begin during pregnancy. If you're feeling anxious, overwhelmed, or dismissed by providers, you're not alone.

Tip: Talk to someone. A doula can help you advocate, access referrals, and recognize red flags. You don't have to wait until things get “bad enough.”

CHAPTER V

Final Thoughts

Your birth story is yours, and it deserves to be honoured, respected, and shaped by your values, needs, and instincts.

There's no perfect birth. There's only your version of a supported one – one where you feel seen, safe, and empowered to make informed decisions, even when those choices shift. That might mean birthing at home in candlelight or having an epidural at 4cm in a hospital room. Both are valid. Both are strong. Both deserve celebration.

The truth? Birth doesn't always follow the script. But you don't need to do it alone. Whether you're seeking guidance, reassurance, advocacy, or just someone to remind you that your voice matters – I'm here.



As a full-spectrum doula, I don't just show up on labour day. I walk with you through the fears, the planning, the messy unknowns, and the powerful moments in between. I bring knowledge, care, and calm – no judgment, no agenda. Just support, tailored to you.

When you're ready to build your birth support team, I'd be honoured to be part of your journey. Let's talk about what you want birth to look and feel like.

With you every step of the way,

- Kat Thompson