

## Dads and Doulas

If you were going to try a potentially dangerous activity like parachuting or climbing mount Everest you would probably want an instructor who was knowledgeable and competent, hopefully someone who had done it all before and knew how it felt to be, say completely underwater with only a tank of air, or how to climb ice. And also someone who would stay with you all the way. The same with childbirth. A doula has been there; she knows what it's like. She doesn't know exactly how your birth going to be because every birth is different. But she'll stay by your side until it's all over.

Research shows that having a doula during labour and birth can mean:

- Shorter labour<sup>1</sup>
- Lower odds of cesareans<sup>2</sup>
- Improved odds of feeling positive about the experience afterwards<sup>3</sup>
- Decrease in the use of Pitocin<sup>4</sup>
- Less likely to request pain medication<sup>5</sup>
- Increased likelihood of successfully establishing breastfeeding & breastfeeding at 6 weeks<sup>6</sup>

So what do doulas actually do to help dads during labour & birth?

- A doula is an addition to your birth team and supports you to have the experience that you want, using physical, emotional and mental support.
- As she is privately employed by you, she knows exactly what you want and supports just that.
- She offers continuous support around the clock, so no shift changes.
- A doula will naturally take a different role to the dad, whose position is unique.
- She can help you to offer comfort measures such as breathing, relaxation, movement & different positions.
- She is an extra set of hands; to bring food and drinks, take photos, update friends & family, care for siblings, if needed remind you of comfort measures & birth plan wishes, give dad a toilet/ sleep/ eating break. At home she can answer your door so you don't have to leave your partner, she can call midwives and when they arrive talk to them about situation and explain your birth plan, if you have a birth pool she can help monitor the temperature and keep it topped up with hot water, take care of music and lighting, close the door to give you total privacy, if there are other friends or family involved she can help organize them so the birth environment is preserved. In hospital she can help carry bags & birth balls, take photos, set up room, talk to midwife about your birth wishes. She helps with comfort measures. If procedures or interventions are offered she can help you know your options and alternatives although normally the father will be discussing the decisions with midwife. In the event of baby needing emergency care the doula can stay with mother while dad stays with baby, or vice versa; so no-one is left alone.
- She has wisdom and experience of the different stages of labour, knowing what is normal at each stage and can give information about what is happening.
- She is a calm presence who has done all this before and can help dad with useful skills, and suggestions while offering continuous support.
- She understands NHS procedures & protocols and can help facilitate communication and understanding.

- She knows that you and your partner will remember the birth of your child for the rest of your lives, she supports you to have a positive emotional experience.
- A doula has chosen her profession because of how she feels about childbirth, it's not just a job to her. She feels strongly about supporting women and their families in the transition to parenthood.

A doula DOES NOT:

- perform any medical tasks
- give medical advice
- make decisions for you or judge any decisions you make
- take over the role of husband or partner
- deliver the baby
- change shifts (unless with pre-agreed shared care)

What's the difference between doulas & midwives?

The role of midwife & doula is similar but different, similar in that they both support women giving birth. But different in that midwives are medically responsible for the women and normally employed by the NHS (unless you hire an independent midwife) and they are on a shift, meaning you can't be sure which midwife you are going to get or how long they are going to stay. A doula is self-employed and has a private contract with you. A dad has a different role, being the life partner and having a much bigger emotional investment in the future of mother and baby.

| <b>Components of Care</b>                          | <b>Dad</b> | <b>Doula</b> | <b>Midwife/Doctor</b>     |
|--|------------|--------------|---------------------------|
| Continuous care during labour & birth              | Yes        | Yes          | ?                         |
| Knows mother personally                            | Yes        | Yes          | ?                         |
| Medically responsible                              | No         | No           | Yes                       |
| Performs clinical tasks                            | No         | No           | Yes                       |
| Gives medical advice                               | No         | No           | Yes                       |
| Makes decisions                                    | Yes        | No           | No, except in emergencies |
| Experience of emotions & physiology of labour      | ?          | Yes          | Yes                       |
| Previous experience with other labouring women     | ?          | Yes          | Yes                       |
| Able to remain calm                                | ?          | Yes          | Yes                       |
| Knowledge of NHS procedures                        | ?          | Yes          | Yes                       |
| Knowledge of comfort measures                      | ?          | Yes          | Yes                       |
| Will be continuing care for the rest of their life | Yes        | No           | No                        |

How to choose the right doula for you:

- Think about what kind of birth you would like for your child & what role you want to take
- Talk with your partner about what kind of birth they want and how you can be a team
- Look at local doulas who are available. You can do a search at Doula UK website: <https://doula.org.uk/find-a-doula/>
- Meet with two or three doulas who cover your area. Take time to choose the one that you both feel most comfortable with. Childbirth is a personal time and you need to feel able to relax and trust your doula.

Things you need to know about me:

- My name is Hazel and I have been supporting pregnant women, birthing women, postnatal women for twelve years both in the UK and abroad.
- I joined the national organisation *Doula UK* three years ago and am now the UK Rep in the European Doula Network.
- I believe that giving birth is an incredible, intense experience that changes every person involved and deserves time & thought in preparation.
- I live near Exeter, Devon with my husband and teenage son on a smallholding.

How much do I cost & what do you get?

- Firstly, you get a free 20-minute phone call right away, if dates fit and we want to proceed then you get a free face-to-face consultation. This meeting is important to find out if I am compatible with you and your partner. I talk through my approach. I listen to your wishes. I give you a copy of my contract. We go away and think about it. Then, if we all agree the contract is signed and deposit of £150 is paid.
- Total cost of birth doula package is £850 and includes:
  - Four antenatal sessions of up to 2 hours each time
  - email / phone support during working hours throughout pregnancy
  - from 38 weeks of pregnancy I am on call 24 hours a day, 7 days a week
  - continuous support during labour & birth
  - two postnatal sessions of up to two hours each time
  - ongoing email/phone support for four weeks postnatally

\*I also offer stand alone antenatal sessions and postnatal care for people who want personalised care but for whatever reason decide not to have a doula at the birth.

What to talk more and take me up on the no-obligation chat?

Awesome! Get in touch via email: [hazeltreedoula@gmail.com](mailto:hazeltreedoula@gmail.com) or phone: 07876267591

I wish you all the very best on your journey into parenting

Hazel Tree

[www.authenticbirth.co.uk](http://www.authenticbirth.co.uk)

#### References:

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3: Characteristics of a Positive Experience for Women Who Have Unmedicated Childbirth

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5: Hodnett, E. D. (2002). "Pain and women's satisfaction with the experience of childbirth: a systematic review." Am J Obstet Gynecol 186(5 Suppl Nature): S160-172. Online at: <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/12011880>

6: Brigstocke S. MIDIRS Midwifery Digest, vol 24, no 2, 2014, pp 157-160. Quoted online at: <https://doula.org.uk/research/>