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A whole world of childcare



## Home Births: The Pros and Cons



## All women in the UK have the right to a home birth



Yet in 2007 only 2.7% of women made this choice (stats from [birthchoiceuk.com](http://birthchoiceuk.com)). Should more women consider home births as an option, and what are the pros and cons of opting for a homebirth?

There are many reasons why someone may choose to have a homebirth rather than a hospital birth. They may feel more comfortable and relaxed in their own home. They may not be happy with the facilities or reputation of their local hospital. Or perhaps a first childbirth went smoothly and the convenience of giving birth in their own home where they won't have to move from labour room to labour ward and then think about getting home from the hospital may be appealing.

On the other side, many women like the reassurance that further medical expertise is available on tap, if it is needed, in a hospital environment. There are more options for pain relief, and on a practical level you don't have to worry about clearing up after the messy experience of childbirth.

Whatever your feelings on the matter I hope to identify some of the pros and cons that you may not have thought about yourselves in this column, to enable you to make a fully informed choice over the type of birth you would like to have.

### Is a home birth safe?

Research shows that being at home facilitates a physiological labour and birth (a natural birth, i.e. not a caesarean section), which is better for the physical and emotional well being of the mother and baby. Recovery is normally faster after a physiological labour, and there is less chance that the baby will be distressed. Being in a familiar environment is relaxing and so helps labour progress.

Being at home, labour is not interrupted and so is more likely to progress without intervention. There is no chance of "just in case" intervention if labour is slowing. Pain is also more manageable and the risk of infection is lower.

Most NHS Trusts have protocols for homebirths in order to provide safe women-centred care. If you fall beyond 'normal parameters' for example if you have diabetes, hypertension, are expecting twins, triplets (or more) or have a pre-existing medical condition that needs to be managed during the birth, your NHS Trust may advise you that a home birth is not the best option for you.

Similarly, there are criteria for the baby, which will also be taken into account. For example, if your baby is smaller than it should be or has a known medical condition your midwife or GP may advise against a home birth. Similarly, if your baby is breach (the wrong way up) or transverse (lying across your body) then a physiological labour, whether at home or in a hospital is unlikely to be an option for you.

## Continuity of care

There are many advantages to having a home birth, but one that I personally feel is the most important is the continuity of care you will receive particularly during labour.

If you choose to have a home birth, then you will usually have all your antenatal appointments in your own home or at a local clinic. These appointments will be with the community midwives, so you will get to know the people who will assist you during the birth beforehand. If you have your antenatal appointments at home, then you may find the service more personalised and supportive.

As soon as you are in labour two of the community midwives will join you and they won't leave until the baby is born. In a hospital environment the midwives change shift at certain times of the day. So, if you have a long labour, you may have several midwives looking after you, and if the labour ward is particularly busy, there may not be enough midwives to provide one to one care at all times.

## What if something goes wrong?

If things don't go to plan during a homebirth, there are protocols in place to ensure the midwives know what to do and when. For example, if there are signs that the baby is distressed, such as, your waters are discoloured when they break (a possible indication of meconium - baby's faeces in the waters), there is a drop or rise in the babies heart rate, or the baby is not in the right position (e.g. breech), then the midwives will arrange for an immediate transfer to hospital. The midwives will also be monitoring you, if you experience a rise in blood pressure or temperature, have vaginal bleeding, or just aren't progressing in the labour, then they may decide it is best to transfer you to hospital.

Typically the midwives will let the hospital know what has happened and to expect you, so when you arrive at the hospital you can be seen and assisted straight away.



## A few more pluses for home births

At home there are no restrictions on birth partners and other support being there. You can make sure you have the equipment you want to help you through labour on hand, for example, hiring a birthing pool (these are not always available in hospital). Once the baby has arrived, the mother and baby are not separated and can start bonding straight away. The father will not be asked to leave you and the new baby over night (which is likely to happen if you and your new baby have to spend the night on a labour ward). Your own bedroom is likely to be much quieter and more relaxing than sharing a ward with three or four other new mothers and babies if you stay in hospital. Finally, family can visit the new arrival at any time.

When I found out I was pregnant with my second child we decided to have a home birth as my first labour was extremely quick and there was no guarantees that my husband would be able to get home and get me to hospital in time if my labour was the same the second time round. I was all for it as it also meant that we wouldn't have to worry about sorting out childcare for my first child. In the end I had to have a caesarean because my second child was breech, but those were some of my personal considerations for wanting a home birth.

From a professional point of view, home births also assist in the development of midwifery skills by supporting women through labour and birth and offering them alternatives to pharmacological pain relief. E.g. The use of water, back rubbing, massage, verbal support, and encouragement.

## A few negatives

There are some disadvantages to home births - home is not always a safe environment for some women, therefore it is important that there is a choice for all women about the birth location. If things start to go wrong during labour then you are reliant on assistance being able to get to you quickly and being able to get you to hospital. This could be an anxious time and not help the labour.

With a home birth you are limited to the extent of pain relief you can expect. Gas and air is the only form of pharmacological pain relief that is available. There is no option to have an epidural if the pain gets too much to bear or you get too tired during a long labour, without going into hospital. Some women may prefer the option of knowing that pain relief is available whether they choose it or not and may need the reassurance that the relief is on tap.

In hospital, the beds are very manoeuvrable and are designed to support a variety of birthing positions safely and comfortably. You may not find the same is true in your home environment.

# Tinies<sup>™</sup> Maternity

Tinies Maternity is a dedicated service that helps families who are looking for a maternity nanny, maternity nurse, doula or night nanny to help them when their new baby is born.

We can advise you on the best maternity care solution for your needs and we source the best childcare for your position. Whether you need a maternity nanny for 12 weeks, a doula for a month or a night nanny to let you get some sleep, we can provide the support you need.

We also know some of the best lactation and sleep consultants in the country who can provide you with up to date advice and support to help get your baby feeding and sleeping well.

Anneli Nix, Tinies Maternity



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