What is a doula?

The word “doula” has come to refer to “a woman experienced in childbirth who provides continuous physical, emotional and informational support to the mother before, during and just after childbirth.” (Klaus, Kennell and Klaus, *Mothering the Mother*). A doula is an assistant who provides various forms of non-medical comfort for a woman in labor, including breathing exercises, relaxation techniques, massage and suggestions for position change.

A doula is just one member of your birth team. Doulas can never replace the father/support person’s role. The doula is there to assist the father/support person in becoming involved in the birth process by providing helpful hints and reminders about how to provide support and encouragement to the laboring woman. Doulas also do not replace nurses, midwives or physicians. In addition to supporting the laboring woman, the medical team performs clinical and medical tasks, such as assessing the mother’s and infant’s vital signs, encouraging comfort measures, monitoring medical interventions, and providing information about the progression of labor and deliver of the baby.

It is important to find a doula that is right for you and your partner, and to inform your obstetrician, family doctor or midwife that you are planning to have a doula be part of your baby’s birth. Most couples start interviewing doulas around the sixth or seventh month of pregnancy.

Your obstetrician, family doctor or midwife may be able to recommend a doula, or you may find one through an organization that trains and certifies doulas. Most of these organizations have referral lists on their websites. You also can learn more about what approach a doula may take from reviewing the website of the certifying organization. A few of the largest doula certification organizations are:

- Childbirth and Postpartum Professionals Association (CAPPA) [www.cappa.net](http://www.cappa.net)
- Doulas of North America (DONA) [www.dona.org](http://www.dona.org)
- International Childbirth Education Association (ICEA) [www.icea.org](http://www.icea.org)

**Interview questions you may want to ask a potential doula include:**

- Are you taking new clients for the month I’m due?
- What is your experience and training as a doula?
- How would you describe your approach to birth as a doula?
- What’s your price?
- Can you provide me with references?

Also, consider what you’re looking for in a doula. You want someone who will support your wants and needs.