

How to Prepare for Birth & Reduce Labor Fear

Giving birth is one of the most (if not THE most) significant things you will ever do. The enormity of the task can feel overwhelming. Sometimes, we end up feeling frozen in fear, unsure of how to even get past that fear in order to prepare for the labor and birth experience.

I have given birth twice now and, to be honest with you, I was just as nervous about the second birth as I was the first. Maybe even more so because I carried with me the trauma of three lost pregnancies since having my first baby.

It's normal to feel a little nervous, but that doesn't mean you have to be scared out of your mind. Birth is a healthy, normal process by which humans have been entering the world for thousands of years.

But if you are feeling considerably fearful of your upcoming birth experience, there are things you can do to reduce your fear and help you prepare for your birth experience. The following three things are my best advice to any mama preparing for birth:

1. Watch/Read Positive Birth Stories.

Mama, I cannot stress enough how important it is to saturate your mind with the normalcy of birth and the fact that it can be a positive experience regardless of what type of birth you are having. I had an unmedicated birth with both of my babies, so I primarily watched and read natural birth stories to prepare. I will say that the birth stories of women who planned ahead of time for a natural birth generally had more positive experiences than those who spontaneously had a natural birth due to a quick labor making it impossible to get an epidural.

Even if you are planning to get an epidural, I highly recommend that you watch some natural births along with epidural births to help you prepare for labor. You will need to know how to cope with contractions until you get an epidural and there is always the possibility that the epidural won't work or you might not have time for one. Also, women who have planned natural births tend to have a more positive, less fearful view of birth, so listening to their stories is a great way to increase your positive thoughts and feelings about birth in general.

Whether you are having a natural birth, an epidural, or a c-section, watching videos about birth (and about your particular type of birth) will help you know what kinds of things to expect. It will help you realize that other women have made it through and you can too. And seeing the beautiful outcome of bringing a baby into the world will inspire you as you await your own baby's arrival.

But whatever you do, do NOT search for or watch traumatic birth stories. If you find those interesting, save them to watch after you have given birth. You do not need traumatic birth experiences filling your mind as you prepare for your own birth. It's good to have a general idea of some things that might not go according to plan, but don't fill your thinking with negative stories.

2. Talk to people you trust.

During my pregnancy with my second daughter, I didn't feel like talking about my pregnancy or my upcoming birth with most people. It was an emotionally challenging pregnancy for me, and I just needed my privacy. But I did talk to my husband and my mom about my struggles and fears as I prepared for birth. It is important to voice your fears so that you can acknowledge and validate them.

When I was in labor with my first baby, I had a doula. At one point, when my labor was not progressing as quickly as we wanted it to, my doula asked me if I was thinking about anything or scared of anything. I don't think I fully realized it until she asked me that, but I was scared of pushing. After I told her that, even though my fear didn't completely go away, I began progressing again. Acknowledging that fear and having someone say supportive things to me about it was immensely helpful.

With my second baby, I did not have a doula, and I was afraid my husband would not know how to support me during labor. So I expressed all of my fears to him in advance. And honestly, I think I got all of my fears out of the way before I even went into labor because I had discussed them several times with my husband already. Just having him know what I was afraid of and knowing that he understood and was willing to support me in those areas helped me a lot as I prepared for birth.

3. Implement Affirmations to Counteract the Fear.

Once you have identified what things you are specifically afraid of by talking about your fears with someone you trust, find or create your own affirmations that contradict or ease those fears.

This was a lot harder for me the second time around. I just couldn't do the affirmations that said, "My body knows how to give birth." I would say them outwardly, but I could not really trust them after my body had, in my mind, messed up with my previous three pregnancies.

So instead, I started focusing on affirmations that met my fears. I was afraid things might go wrong, so I focused on saying, "God will be with me throughout this birth." I was afraid labor would not progress quickly enough and I would get physically stuck because of my emotional state. So I focused on saying, "I am relaxed. I am open." as I envisioned my cervix opening.

I believe that last affirmation significantly contributed to restarting my stalled progress during the last couple hours of my labor. I had only gone from 7 to 8 ½ centimeters in four hours of laboring as I stood and swayed. I was exhausted and the contractions hurt. It's easy to tense up when something hurts, but I focused on relaxing my cervix as much as possible to make room for baby. I laid in the bed and mentally repeated, "I am relaxed. I am open." through every contraction. This allowed me to progress from 8 ½ to 10 centimeters in about an hour and a half.

Start saying affirmations out loud or listening to them from an app as you fall asleep at night to get them implanted into your head. Then, when a fear rises up in your thinking, you can easily pull an affirmation out of your memory bank to fight it off.

Mama, as you prepare for your upcoming birth, know that you are not alone. So many women have gone through this already and understand what it is like to be afraid. But so many women have pushed through that fear and found the strength to have a positive birth experience.

Birth doesn't have to be scary. Neither of my births were scary. My first birth was very long but not terribly painful. My second birth was pretty painful but so much shorter. With both births, I was happy with the outcome and my overall experience.

Oh, and can I just mention one more thing? I don't view myself as a particularly strong individual. I get pretty anxious about the expectation of pain or physically uncomfortable procedures. I can't even watch the needle when I get bloodwork done (and I have had to have TONS of bloodwork over the past few years).

But you know what? I still did it. I gave birth. TWICE. Without any trauma. And I had positive experiences with both. So you can do it too, Mama. I have no doubt. If I can do it, you most certainly can too!