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# How birth companions can support providers during labour and delivery

Breakthrough RESEARCH

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# How birth companions can support providers during labour and delivery



### What are companions and why are they important?

### Every woman has the right to be accompanied by a birth companion. This companion can be any person chosen by the woman:

- · Stay with her during labour and childbirth;
- Accompany her to the hospital, even during the COVID-19 pandemic, and;
- Support the woman after the baby is born until discharge.

## Women value and benefit from the presence of someone they trust. With a trusted companion present, women are more likely to:

- Feel safe, strong, confident, and secure.
- Feel like they can ask questions of the providers.
- Feel support from providers about their anxieties and fears.
- Have better maternal and perinatal outcomes.

## Having an individual of her choice is of greater benefit than having staff from the facility as her companion.

- · Midwives and other health providers can explain things to the woman and companion;
- · Companions may also assist the midwife in small tasks she may ask her to do;
- Companions can speak up in support of women to ensure they receive assistance on time; and
- Trusted companions can provide practical and emotional support throughout labour and delivery.











### What can a companion do?

### Provide support to the woman during labour. The companion can:

- Encourage her and rub the woman's back, legs, and arms as needed, to help relieve pain
- Wipe her brow, neck, or chest with a wet cloth or fan her to keep her cool
- Hold her hand between contractions, if she wants
- ✓ Assist her to walk around and find a position that is comfortable to her

- Assist her to the toilet and help her take a bath/shower in early labour if she chooses
- Talk to her—give emotional support and provide information on what is happening
- Remind her that it is okay to shout, yell, or cry out during the delivery
- Help the woman to relax between contractions and use deep breathing exercises



# Companions can support the labour process by assisting the midwife with whatever she/he asks, and by reminding and encouraging the woman to:

- ✓ Urinate every 2 hours
- Drink fluids every hour or more and eat lightly as she wishes



- Use comfortable positions for labour (walking, sitting, side-lying)
- Push only when guided by the by the midwife



 Use breathing methods that can help her relax

### Companions can support communication between the midwife and the woman by:

- ✓ Listening to the midwife's instructions and helping communicate them to the woman
- Helping the woman ask questions and making sure she gets the information she needs
- ✓ Make sure the midwife hears and responds to the woman's requests [e.g., painkillers]

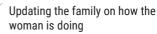
### After delivery, birth companions can help:

 Observe woman and baby closely, check for danger signs such as abnormal bleeding, report such bleeding to midwife



- Ensure the woman is properly counseled on self care and baby care by the midwife
- ✓ After normal delivery, encourage the woman to drink fluids regularly
- Make sure the woman is not separated from the baby (unless medically indicated)

Making sure referral plans are pre-established and adhered to as necessary.



- Ensure skin-to-skin contact is maintained
- Support early initiation of breastfeeding



- Report bleeding from cord and difficulties in baby's breathing
- Help the midwife dress, take care of, and check the baby and help the new mother change the nappy/diaper

### What should you as a provider ask or remind a companion?

#### As a provider, you can ensure that birth companions know to call for help if:

- ✓ A routine assessment is due but the midwife is not around
- $\checkmark$  The woman's amniotic membrane ruptures
- The woman is bearing down with contractions  $\checkmark$
- ✓ Contractions have been regular but suddenly stop
- $\checkmark$ She is suddenly in much more pain
- She loses consciousness or has fits

#### Remind the birth companion that they SHOULD:

- ✓ Wash their hands with soap before entering or leaving the labour ward
- ✓ Wear a mask during labour and delivery (following COVID-19 guidelines)
- ✓ Wash their hands before and after touching the baby

#### Remind the companion that they should NOT:

- $\bigcirc$  Slap or yell at the woman
- $\odot$  Encourage the woman to push unless asked by midwife
- $\bigcirc$  Give advice other than that given by the midwife
- $\odot$  Keep the woman in bed if she wants to move around

#### Briefing the companion: What to expect during childbirth

As some companions may have never experienced • Where another nurse, doctor or midwife can be a birth before, please take a few minutes to brief the companion on what to expect during labour and delivery and how they can best support you, healthcare provider

Upon arrival, orient the companion to labour & delivery unit, particularly if you are working alone. Show her/him where essential supplies are stored, and make a plan for how the companion can help in an emergency.

- Provide any local medicine/ herbs or conduct any physical examinations
- S Disclose any confidential information

found to help.

Solution Bring any other companions or family members into the labour ward

Bandages, gauze pads and sterile water.

how to assist with putting it on.

and where urine can be disposed.

what the midwife tells them

If a NASG is available, where it is stored and

Where shower or bathing facilities are located,

• The companion's presence and support does

NOT replace midwife; they should always follow

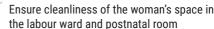
There is heavy vaginal bleeding She is breathing fast and feels "clammy" or she feels her heart

If she feels drowsy or collapses

The baby is not suckling

is racing

- ✓ If there is any other concern
  - Ensure cleanliness of the woman's space in the labour ward and postnatal room
  - Follow other infection prevention guidelines (including COVID-19 guidelines)









Labour and childbirth differ from pregnancy to pregnancy, but there are always four basic stages: early and active labour, birth, delivery of the placenta, and recovery. Please **describe the key events that happen during each stage so the companion and woman knows what to expect.** 

There are many common procedures that happen during birth, but with which the companion may not be familliar. Briefly **explain the following procedures and their timing**:

- Palpating the abdomen to check contractions, ½ hourly.
- Checking the foetal heart rate, ½ hourly.
- Vaginal or pelvic examinations are conducted once every four hours.
- Ultrasound monitoring (if available).

• Giving an injection or starts an IV line.

Emergency situations sometimes occur. In these situations it will be very important to act quickly:

- There may not be time for thorough explanations.
- Trust the midwife and do whatever they ask.
- It may be most helpful to stand at the head of the woman to comfort her and support slow deep breathing.

If the companion cannot manage a difficult situation, they can leave at any time, but should inform the midwife or nurse on duty.

If a companion is disruptive or creates a dangerous situation, they will be asked to leave.

#### What you as a provider can ask the companion to do to support you:



Emotional support and comfort to woman: Ask the companion to comfort the woman, encourage her and massage her back to ease the pain. Assist the woman with elimination when needed.



Food and water: Ask the companion to prepare food and water and keep it close by. Encourage the woman to eat and drink as desired.



**Extra pair of hands:** Remind the companion to not go far from the delivery room and ask them to do simple tasks as needed.



**Torch bearer:** If needed, you can ask the companion to switch on a light or hold a torch when you check on the woman during and after delivery.



**Bleeding monitor:** After delivery, tell the companion to regularly ask the mother and check the bed for bleeding, and report to the midwife if there is blood.



**Baby care:** You can ask the companion to help dress, take care of, and check the baby. Check the baby for danger signs

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