

Creating a great birth space.

The environment you give birth is going to have a direct impact on your physical and emotional experience of birth and even on the way your labour and birth unfold.

So it makes sense to spend a bit of quality time prior to labour, making your birth space special. To have the best possible birth for you, you need to give birth in an environment that makes you feel safe, comfortable and relaxed and allows you to produce an important hormone Oxytocin. This won't be the same environment and space for every person - we are all different. There are a couple of things we can draw on to make this process easier. Firstly, we are mammals and all mammals have similar criteria for their birth spaces. That is: dark, warm, private, safe, quiet and undisturbed.

Secondly- Oxytocin, we know that the key labour hormone oxytocin brings about a feeling of well-being: it is produced by the brain during love-making as well as during childbirth. Its action on the smooth muscles in the body causes the womb to contract during labour and it enhances that 'falling in love' sensation experienced by many people when they set eyes on their new baby. In the same way that a couple making love instinctively seeks out a warm private place where they feel safe to express themselves freely, a labouring person will most effectively encourage and maintain the flow of oxytocin in her body if she is in a place where she feels safe and secluded.

Thinking about these two important factors will help you decide what you need to bring or create in your about and birthing space. It can be harder in some places and easier in others, but it's still possible. When you are labouring at home (during the latent phase we talked about last week) you will have free reign and all the time you like to do this. But it's still possible (and equally important) in the hospital too. Think of these rooms a little bit like a hotel room you are staying in for the duration of your labour and birth. Bring things with you to add to the space, so have it how you'd like it.

Here are some ideas for creating a great birth space.

Darkness

If you are labouring at home in the daytime, pull the curtain and turn off bright lights. Keep the spaces dimly lit, using sidelights, candles and fairy lights - whatever you choose.

If you are in hospital, you can again lower the lights, and take in a battery-operated tea light and fairy lights if you'd like to. A great trick I let people know in my classes is to bring a string of fairy lights for the bathroom - one of the most underrated places to labour but which often has bright lighting.

Sight

You can put up positive affirmations on the wall or around your house. And you can take this into a hospital with you and do the same. Some people make 'affirmation bunting' or just print out A4 sheets or even colour them in to make larger sheets of affirmations.

Move the furniture around so it suits you. Take into hospital your birth ball or extra cushions if you'd like to so you can move around freely into different positions.

Photos or other pictures that fill you with happiness and oxytocin can be great to have around your birth space, whether at home or in hospital. These could be of family or friends, of happy holidays or even pictures drawn by your other children.



Smell

Our sense of smell is so strong, and attached to memories in an instant. So you can take items from home like pillowcases with you, to make a hospital setting more homely and smell familiar - less like a hospital!.

You can also use smell as an anchor for relaxation throughout pregnancy and then in labour. Essential oils can be brilliant for this (make sure they are pregnant safe ones you choose). Lavender can be great to relax, and citrus oils great for energy, Frankincense can help you breathe better. There are many ways to use aromatherapy. They can be used in massage oil, in the bath, in a diffuser or on a tissue to sniff or even a spray bottle with a carrier oil (nice and cooling too) or a simple roll-on.

Privacy

Feeling comfortable with the people in your birth space is important. At home this is easy, there will only be people there you let in! In hospital then you still control this, your birth partner can act as a guardian of the space, meeting and greeting anyone at the door (like in a hotel room) and inviting them in (if their presence is welcome!)

Everyone on your care team should introduce themselves, and having this familiarity is important to feel safe. Some women find that a birth pool has feelings of privacy and safety, as well as the benefits of the water itself and this is often (although certainly not always) a feature of a home birth space. And people often move into the smaller space like that of the bathroom to labour (both at home or in hospital) as it feels small and safe and private.

Good Vibes Only

Keeping your mind focused on your labour and your baby is so important, and it can be easy to get distracted in a busy hospital with machines beeping. The paramount responsibility of your birth partner is to give you positive energy and keep your mind present for the work your body is doing. They might do some massage or light touch stroking, or simply keep reminding you what an amazing job you're doing (because you definitely are)! Positive energy and interactions increase oxytocin, the hormone responsible for bringing your baby into the world.

Preparing yourself and your partner to approach the pain of labour without fear is important, particularly if this is your first baby. You may both be venturing into the unknown yet a mother's physical and emotional body is well prepared: you have your instincts, your innate knowledge of birth and your aptitude for endurance. You can use movement, free positioning, water, warmth and intimacy with your partner to help you. You can also draw on your carefully chosen LMC. The reassurance of knowing your trusted attendants are sitting calmly nearby or the comfort of the feeling of your partner's skin against yours, even when your contractions seem overwhelming, can convey to you without words that all is well.

By setting up a birth space that embraces privacy, like-minded people and a united positive attitude to pain, your labour is more likely to remain undisturbed, more likely to stay safe. Even if medical assistance becomes necessary for you or your baby's physical and emotional wellbeing.

Your birth space should be calm and relaxing, you need to feel at ease, your labouring and birth space can really work for you and it's an important part of your birthing toolkit - so don't overlook it! One simple thing could make all the difference to you and how you feel. So - spend a bit of quality time thinking and discussing what you need to help achieve the feeling of calmness and happiness.

