

Birth Consultants: What Are They and Why Do You Need One

Hiring a birth consultant sounds like something you'd hear of in a comedy movie, but it's becoming more and more common and for good reason. These people are passionate about pregnancy and birth and love talking about everything from the best baby swings to how to do a double-hammock back carry. If you're interested in hiring a birth consultant to help you, here's what you need to know.

What is a birth consultant?

Many people think birth consultants and doulas are the same thing, but they actually perform very different functions. A doula is a labor support person — although there are also post-partum doulas — and takes an active, hands-on role in supporting the mother through her labor and birth. A birth consultant, on the other hand, is not usually even present at the birth but, instead, provides the expectant mother information about any and every topic related to birth and assists her in making decisions.

So if you're a first-time mom who doesn't have any friends or family nearby and you're not sure what you *really* need on your baby registry, a birth consultant could go to the store with you and help you select the items that fit your needs. She will be able to give you advice — backed up by research — as to which car seat is best and how many preemie diapers you really need.

A birth consultant can also be a convenient way to get the information you need on certain topics. Let's say you really want to breastfeed your baby, but you don't know anyone who has or your friends only have horror stories. A birth consultant would be able to provide you with names and contact information of local breastfeeding support groups, IBCLC lactation consultants, and literature and links to common breastfeeding hurdles and how to overcome them.

How does this help me?

When it comes to parenting, there are a ton of different — and often conflicting — opinions out there, and the topics of pregnancy and birth are no different. One of the biggest benefits of hiring a birth consultant is that you have someone who is going to present you with options and suggestions that are well researched and is going to tell you the pros and cons so that you can make a well-educated decision. You don't have to Google and wonder whether the person behind the site is legitimate and you have a direct point person to ask follow up questions.

The continuity of care that comes with a birth consultant is also of great benefit. When you're talking to the same person over the course of your pregnancy, the consultant gets a chance to really get to know you and make recommendations and share options that are tailored to your interests. For example, if your birth consultant knows you want to prioritize delayed cord clamping and skin-to-skin contact, she can help you identify care providers and birth facilities that have these options.

How do I find a birth consultant?

While birth consultants are becoming more popular, you may have difficulty finding someone who offers face-to-face meetings in your area. Contacting local doulas and midwives and asking if they can recommend someone is a good first step, but there are also many birth consultants that offer virtual services. (Keep in mind that while birth consultants may have additional certifications and training, they

are not medical professionals and are not a substitute for quality OBGYN or midwifery care.) As with any care provider, you'll want to talk to a few and have a list of interview questions ready to help you get a feel for whether the person is a good fit for your family.