



### WHAT IS A MIDWIFE?

Certified nurse-midwives (CNMs) are licensed health care providers educated in nursing and midwifery. Certified midwives (CMs) are licensed health care providers educated in midwifery. CNMs and CMs have graduated from college; they have passed a national examination; and they have a licence to practice midwifery from the state they live in. Most of the midwives in the United States are CNMs or CMs.

### What Do Midwives Do?

CNMs/CMs help over 300,000 women give birth each year in the United States. Most of these births are in hospitals. CNMs/CMs also care for women who decide to have their baby in freestanding birth centers and/or at home. CNMs/CMs provide health care to women all through life, including: prenatal care, birth, care after birth, care for the new baby, annual exams, birth control planning, menopause, and health counseling.

### Why Would I Choose a Midwife for Care During My Pregnancy?

CNMs/CMs believe you need time and special attention so you can be healthy and able to take care of your baby. Midwives specialize in providing *support*, regular health care, and in helping you get any additional care needed. Midwives are experts in knowing the difference between normal changes that occur during pregnancy and symptoms that require extra attention.

### What if I Have a “High-Risk” Pregnancy or Complication During Labor?

Your CNM/CM will prescribe medicine and order treatment for any common illness that you might get during pregnancy. Midwives work with doctors who specialize in illness during pregnancy. If you have a medical problem during pregnancy or complication during labor, your midwife will work with a doctor to make sure you get the best and safest care for you and your baby. Your midwife will also work with other health care providers: nurses, social workers, nutritionists, doulas, childbirth educators, physical therapists, and other specialists to help you get the care you need.

### What if I Want Pain Medicine During Labor?

If you think you want pain medicine during labor, your midwife will give you information about the medicines available so you can decide what is right for you. Midwife means “with woman.” If you decide you want pain medicine during labor, your midwife can prescribe it for you.

### Should I See a Midwife if I am Not Pregnant?

Many women go to their CNM or CM for annual check ups, family planning, and to get care for common infections that happen to women. For example, your midwife can answer questions about all the methods of birth control, help you decide what is best and safest for you, and prescribe it for you.

## QUESTIONS TO ASK WHEN CHOOSING A HEALTH CARE PROVIDER DURING PREGNANCY

### Questions to Ask Any Health Care Provider

- Do you practice alone or with others? Do they share your beliefs and manner of practice?
- Who attends births for you when you are away? How can I reach you?
- What kind of childbirth preparation do you recommend?
- Do you provide labor support and stay with women throughout labor?
- How do you feel about doulas or family and friends being with me during labor?
- Do you allow moving around and eating or drinking during labor?
- Can I hold my baby right after birth, breastfeed, and not be separated?
- When do you recommend IVs, fetal heart rate monitoring, pitocin, or episiotomy?
- Do you care for women who want a vaginal birth after a previous C-section?
- How much do you charge? Is your care paid for by my insurance?

### Questions to Ask Providers In Free-Standing Birth Centers

- What are your requirements for birth in this center?
- How often do women in your birth center go to a hospital during labor?
- When do you advise women to go into the hospital?
- What are your arrangements if I have a problem that requires being in a hospital?

### Questions to Ask Providers Who Attend Homebirths

- How do you handle problems during labor? When would we go to the hospital?
- What drugs and equipment do you use in the home?
- Do you have a formal agreement with an obstetrician/gynecologist to provide care if problems occur?
- Which hospital will I be transported to if a problem occurs during labor?
- Would you stay with me if we transfer?
- Are you trained in newborn resuscitation?
- How many times do you visit after my baby is born?

### FOR MORE INFORMATION:

[www.MyMidwife.org](http://www.MyMidwife.org)—A Web site with information on midwifery, maternity, women's health, and family-centered care. There is a "find a midwife" link, where you can search for a midwife by location.

[www.ChildbirthConnection.org](http://www.ChildbirthConnection.org)—A not-for-profit organization that has worked to improve maternity care for mothers, babies, and families since 1918. They promote safe, effective, and satisfying evidence-based maternity care.

[www.ourbodiesourselves.org](http://www.ourbodiesourselves.org)—Our Bodies Ourselves (OBOS), also known as the Boston Women's Health Book Collective (BWHBC), is a nonprofit, public interest women's health education, advocacy, and consulting organization.

[www.jmwh.org](http://www.jmwh.org)—A link to other, free Share With Women columns.

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*Adapted with permission from Our Bodies, Ourselves: A New Edition for a New Era (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005).*