



Brief Overview of a Doula

Doula comes from [Ancient Greek](#) δούλη (*doulē*) meaning "woman's servant." Greek labor supporters as well as various other global doulas, call themselves labor companions or birthworkers. [Anthropologist](#) Dana Raphael used the term for experienced mothers assisting new mothers in [breastfeeding](#) and newborn care in [Tender Gift: Breastfeeding](#) (1973).^{[[citation needed](#)]} [Marshall Klaus](#) and [John Kennell](#), who conducted clinical trials on the medical outcomes of doula-attended births, adopted the term to refer to labor support.^[3]

History

The concept of a doula is not new. Personal support by a close friend or relative through labor is a tradition that goes back many years in all cultures.^{[[citation needed](#)]} Some women do not live in close-knit communities where their sisters, mothers, aunts, and friends are there to support them through pregnancy, childbirth and motherhood; these events can be scary and can make a woman feel lost if she has to experience them alone.

A doula helps fill this gap by providing support to the woman and her partner or support system throughout the childbearing year. A doula does not replace the support system; instead, they help support them so that they can focus on loving and encouraging the laboring woman. Doulas can serve as a source of information during pregnancy, labor and birth. A doula assists families in gathering information about their pregnancy, labor and the options available for delivery.

Doulas can be trained and experienced in childbirth. Their goal is to provide continuous physical, emotional, and informational support before and during labour, birth, and the immediate postpartum period. The intent of a doula is to help the woman have a safe and satisfying experience, as the woman defines it.

Types

A **labor doula or birth doula** is someone who provides non-[medical](#) support (physical and emotional) to a woman leading up to and during her labor and delivery, an aspect of care that was traditionally practiced in midwifery. A labor doula may





attend a woman having a home birth or a woman laboring at home before transporting to a hospital or a birth center, where she will continue support. Doulas do not perform clinical duties such as heart rate checks or vaginal exams, or give medical advice. Labor doulas rely on techniques like massage, aromatherapy, visualization, positive positioning, emotional support, encouragement, and nurturing to help women through labor. Many offer phone and email support as well as prenatal and postpartum visits to ensure the mother is informed and supported. The terms of a labor/birth doula's responsibilities are decided between the doula and the family. The doula is also an ally for the father or partner, who may have little experience with the labor process and may also find the process anxiety provoking. Often the doula will help the partner find ways to support the laboring woman. Studies have shown that childbirth education can help reduce paternal anxiety ^[6] and one of the doula's roles is to educate.^[7] A responsible doula supports, encourages, and educates the father or partner in his or her support style rather than replacing them.^[8]

Dr. John Kennell, who has studied the impact doulas have on mothers, babies, and childbirth, says, "If a Doula were a drug, it would be malpractice not to use it".^[9]

A **postpartum doula** a.k.a. **postnatal doula** provides support to the mother and family following the birth and immediate postpartum period. This can be for a few days or up to and beyond six weeks, depending on need. This may include breastfeeding support, newborn care assistance, cooking, light housekeeping and errands. Such doulas offer education, companionship and nonjudgmental support during for the few weeks following the birth, as well as evidence-based information on infant feeding, emotional and physical recovery from birth, infant soothing and coping skills for new parents and makes appropriate referrals when necessary.^[11]

Facts & Figures

Across Australia we have seen a rise in the number of women wanting to avoid medical intervention during childbirth. The use of a Doula has been proven to enhance the wellbeing of mothers and babies, and reduce the need for medical intervention. They also increase the chance of achieving spontaneous vaginal birth, shorter labours and lessen the use of pain medication. Postpartum Doula use has also been linked to higher levels of maternal self esteem, lower anxiety levels and a reduction in post natal depression





*Studies consistently demonstrate very impressive benefits for the mother, father and baby, including:

- 50% less caesarean sections
- Reduction in the use of forceps by 40%
- 60% less requests for epidurals
- 40% reduction in the use of synthetic oxytocin for inductions or augmentations
- 30% reduction in use of pain medication
- 25% reduction in labour length
- Increased rates of breastfeeding at 6 weeks post-partum (51% vs 29%)
- Higher self-esteem (74% vs 59%), less anxiety (28% vs 40%) and less depression (10% vs 23%) at 6 weeks post-partum



***References:**

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Doula>

<http://www.bellybelly.com.au/>

