

# Your Pregnancy: Ways to Advocate for Yourself

[Host] During pregnancy, your wishes and values are just as important as your physical care.

Respectful health care starts by finding a doctor or midwife who you're comfortable with.

It is also important to know your rights as a patient and to feel confident to speak up for yourself.

This is called advocating for yourself.

And it can help you get the care and the attention you need and deserve.

Here are some ways to advocate for yourself—and your baby—during pregnancy and childbirth.

One: Know your medical history and discuss it with your care team to learn what it means for your pregnancy.

[Becky] "I have a history of prediabetes. And my mother has diabetes.

I brought it up in my first appointment with my midwife.

We talked about my risks for getting gestational diabetes and the tests I'd likely have during pregnancy and during labor and delivery.

I'm glad I brought it up in that first appointment so I would know what to expect."

[Sam] "At the last appointment before I gave birth, my blood pressure was a little bit high.

The doctor told me that high blood pressure could mean preeclampsia.

And they let me know the symptoms to watch for.

So a few days later when my head hurt like it had never hurt before, I didn't wait.

I went straight to the hospital. The care team took care of me right away."

[Host] Two: Learn as much as you can about pregnancy.

And don't be afraid to ask questions about a symptom, pain, or feeling.

It's okay to keep asking until you feel your concerns have been addressed.

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[Nikki] "While I was pregnant, I was really excited about everything that was going on with my body.

During an ultrasound, the midwife was so quiet and had a funny look on her face.

It made me think she found something wrong. So I stopped her and asked.

She explained that she was just concentrating and listening.

And then she showed me the outline of my baby's foot."

[Chris] "I know a lot of people enjoy being pregnant, but I was never physically comfortable throughout my pregnancy.

Each trimester brought on another symptom.

At one of my prenatal visits, I described—well, more like 'complained'—about how I was cramping.

The doctor said something like, 'It's just normal Braxton Hicks.' Later that night, I was so uncomfortable, and I just felt something was wrong.

Turns out, I was actually in preterm labor.

They treated it, and the contractions stopped."

[Host] Three: Have a plan.

And make sure your doctor or midwife is aware of your wishes and birthing plan.

Let your doctor or midwife share their recommendations and their reasoning.

And be prepared for when things don't go as you hoped.

[Layla] "Everything I read about pregnancy said, 'Have a plan.' Of course, not everything I planned happened.

But during my prenatal visits, I talked to my midwife about the 'what ifs.' I also asked her directly about how she would let me know that our plan needed to change.

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Those conversations made me know they were doing everything possible to keep me and my baby safe."

[Host] Four: Build relationships with your care team.

[Tommie] "At every visit, I made it a point to remember the names of the nurses and the other people who took care of me.

I also remember my friend telling me that she had a great relationship with her doctor, but that he was on vacation when her baby was born.

So I asked to meet the other doctors who may be called when it's time for me to give birth."

[Host] Five: Know that you can change doctors or midwives.

You can change at any time if you don't feel comfortable or if you think you need better care and attention.

Or if your provider ever makes you feel scared or unsafe during your pregnancy, it's reasonable—and your right—to stop seeing that provider.

[Pat] "I realize a doctor can have a bad day, but I didn't feel my doctor and I were ever on the same page.

I thought it might be a hassle to change doctors, but it turned out that there was another doctor who was available, and they were just who I was looking for and what I needed."

[Host] Six: Bring a friend, a loved one, or your partner to support you during prenatal visits.

[Clare] "I told my best friend about my worst fears about childbirth.

She was so calm and reassuring. I asked her to come with me to my prenatal visits.

At one appointment I mentioned that I had some swelling in one of my legs.

The doctor didn't answer. My friend repeated my question. And I'm glad she did.

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The swelling wasn't normal. It was a blood clot.

It all turned out fine, but who knows what would have happened if my friend hadn't been there?"

[Host] The people caring for you during pregnancy and childbirth are responsible for giving you the respectful care you deserve.

They're busy, but they should never be too busy to answer your questions and care for you with respect.

And remember, you know yourself best. You're also an important part of the care team.

So learn as much as you can, speak up with your questions and concerns, and trust yourself—even when you feel unsure.

It can help to know that you have a right to health care that keeps you—and your baby—safe.