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The Longest Month of Pregnancy: Your 30-day Survival Guide

**Ideas and activities to help you enjoy the home stretch.
Prepare for birth and postpartum. Build your confidence.
Nourish yourself. Bond with your baby.**



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Any information I share is based on personal and professional research and experience. I am not a medical professional. You should contact your healthcare provider if you have concerns about your physical, mental, or emotional wellness.

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Introduction & Categories

The longest month of pregnancy.

For many parents, the last month of pregnancy can seem to drag on and on. And even if it doesn't feel that way to you, I'm almost sure you're experiencing a wide range of emotions about your upcoming birth and welcoming your new baby into your family. Pregnancy, birth, and parenting are so different for each individual person and we can never predict exactly what course this transition will take. I think that's the beauty of it. Giving birth and becoming a parent is so common, yet so mysterious, and it's incredibly transformative and powerful.

This is your survival guide for your last weeks of pregnancy. I've given you 30 days worth of information, links to resources, ideas and activities. My goal is to help you prepare for birth and postpartum, help you build your confidence as you anticipate birthing and parenting your child, help you practice self-care and pamper yourself a little bit, and help you connect with your baby. Use it as you see fit. You might do every single thing I suggest and you might studiously do one activity a day for 30 days. Or you might browse through it, picking and choosing what you most want to do and setting your own timeline. When you begin is up to you. We all know that babies come at different times and they come when they're ready. I don't intend for you to start this guide exactly 30 days before your estimated due date. Start it whenever you'd like and be prepared for your baby to come before you're finished or to finish before your baby has been born.

The activities and ideas are organized into five categories. I've interspersed the categories throughout the guide instead of grouping all the activities for each category together. This way, if you do follow the guide in order, you'll have a rich variety of topics as you go through each day. Below is a short description of each of the five categories. I've also included space to write the date and take notes each day. I've listed web links as web addresses in case you're using a hard copy of the guide and need to type the address into your web browser.

I hope that this guide is a companion to you during the home stretch of your pregnancy, and that you feel more prepared, confident, relaxed, and invigorated as a result of working with it. Congratulations on your pregnancy and enjoy! You'll have your baby in your arms in no time!

Category 1: Prepare for Birth

I'm sure it feels like there's so much to do to prepare for your upcoming birth. Birth is unpredictable and you can never fully plan for your birth. However, if you do some work ahead of time, you'll be better prepared to own your birth experience and remain a conscious, autonomous decision-maker throughout the process. I'll share 10 days of birth preparation; tools for comfort during labor, ideas to help prepare your body for a healthy labor, and tips on communicating with your care providers effectively so that your wishes are heard and respected. Do what you can, and then let go and trust yourself to birth your baby in the way that is best for you.



Category 2: Plan for Postpartum Wellness

It's easy to forget to plan for your postpartum days. There is so much excitement about being pregnant and your upcoming birth! After your baby is born, you'll find yourself with many new responsibilities and the way you spend your time will be much different. You'll be so glad you took some time to make plans for a smoother and gentler postpartum transition. You can get my postpartum wellness toolkit, with a postpartum wellness worksheet, postpartum supply list, and postpartum affirmations by signing up for my newsletter at <http://www.taylordaviddoula.com/postpartum-wellness-toolkit-optin/>. I'll also break down some of the steps included in the toolkit and give you 5 days of actionable ideas below.

NOTE: Go to <http://www.postpartum.net/Get-the-Facts.aspx> to read about signs of postpartum mood disorders and make sure that you seek support if you are experiencing these. You can go to <http://www.postpartum.net/Get-Help/Support-Resources-Map-Area-Coordinator.aspx> for assistance getting help if you need it. Remember that the sooner you get help, the better off you and your baby will be. It takes strength to ask for help and you can do it.



Category 3: Build Your Confidence

It's normal and OK to have fears about childbirth. The mind-body connection is strong and there are things you can do before the birth to help you grow your confidence and work towards remaining in a positive state of mind. I'll share 5 different ideas to help you build your confidence and truly believe that you can do this!

Category 4: Nourish Yourself

Along with building your confidence, you'll also want to truly take care of yourself and pamper yourself during your last days of pregnancy. For some pregnant people, these days can feel long and the excitement about meeting baby can become quite strong. I'll share 5 different ways that you can slow down and focus on your own well-being. And if you're nearing your estimated due date, or have passed it, this is a beautiful read: <http://www.mothering.com/articles/the-last-days-of-pregnancy-a-place-of-in-between/>.

Category 5: Baby Love

The whole reason you're doing this in the first place! You'll learn so much early on about caring for your newborn in your first days with him/her. Trust your instincts and you will do wonderfully. I have found that during tough moments of pregnancy and labor, it can be so helpful to remember to connect with your baby. I'll share 5 ideas for connecting with and preparing to care for your baby.



Day 1

Prepare for Birth: The 3 R's and slow breathing

Today's Date:

I'm guessing that you hope to cope well with labor! "Losing it" or becoming scared, worried, or upset during labor is completely normal and OK, but what if you could learn about something that has helped other people cope well with labor?

Through her work and observations of people in labor, author, experienced doula, childbirth educator, and birth counselor, Penny Simkin, has identified 3 common characteristics birthing people who cope well with labor: relaxation, rhythm, and ritual.

While it's important to prepare for childbirth and to practice comfort measures and coping techniques, also remember that you will most likely develop coping techniques instinctively and spontaneously while in labor. This is what Penny has seen time and again while supporting families during labor. If your birth partner can help you stay grounded in your 3 R's and minimize distractions, he or she will be a huge help to you!

To Do:

- ✓ Watch this short video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mo4VmghHmxs>. You can practice the breathing techniques from the video if you'd like.
- ✓ Read the article titled *The 3 R's in Childbirth Preparation* under "Articles and Handout" on this page: <https://www.pennysimkin.com/articles-resources/>.
- ✓ Share these resources with your birth partner so that he or she knows what to look for in identifying that you have, in fact, found your 3 R's (relaxation, rhythm, and ritual) during labor.



Notes:

Day 2

Build your Confidence: Birth affirmations

Today's Date:

The mind-body connection is incredibly strong during pregnancy, labor, and birth. Of course there can be fear and stress surrounding pregnancy and birth, but sometimes we forget to focus on the positive as well. If you take time to build a positive birth narrative for yourself, you will increase the flow of beneficial birth hormones and potentially improve your labor and birth experience.

To Do:

- ✓ Take a look at the list of birth affirmations below.
- ✓ Identify the 5 or so that most resonate with you. Also, feel free to write some of your own.
- ✓ Write them on post-its and place them around your house in places you look every day AND/OR create an artistic display with the affirmations that you can also have with you when you're in labor.

Birth Affirmations:

I trust birth	My baby will be born at the right time
Strong contractions are good contractions	I am calm and relaxed
With each contraction, my body opens a little more	I am strong and can let the contractions be strong
Contractions help my baby to be born	The power of birth strengthens me
I relax easily	My baby's head fits perfectly in my pelvis
I welcome the change that birth will bring	My birth canal will open smoothly to birth my baby
The pain of birth can't hurt me	I am opening my mind and heart
I can separate myself from pain	I am a good parent to my child
My baby and I are working together	My baby feels my love
My baby and I are ready for the work we will do	Release, relax, let go, surrender
I am grateful for this powerful experience	Loose and limp
My baby knows what to do	Open
My body knows what to do	Stay in the moment
I feel the love of those who are helping me	One contraction at a time
I am gentle and strong	Breathe into it
I am able to labor smoothly	I can breathe my baby down and out
Rise, peak, fall, rest	I can do anything for 1 day
I share in the strength and wisdom of the parents who have come before me	

Notes/other affirmations:

Day 3

Plan for Postpartum Wellness: Snacks & meals

Today's Date:

Good nutrition is so important during your postpartum days. Your body needs to recover and restore its vitamin and mineral stores. Eating healthy, nutritious food may be one of the hardest logistical tasks of the postpartum period. When you are busy with the tasks of caring for a newborn and you are adjusting to your new role, it can be easy to push your own feeding needs aside. Partners and other helpers can be SO helpful in making sure you always have healthy, nourishing food and water at hand. If you're chestfeeding, you especially need to eat to satiation and you will need to take in more calories and protein than if you are not. While feeding you will want to consume about the same number of calories you did while you are pregnant in order to produce a healthy milk supply.

To Do:

- ✓ Make a few meals to put in your freezer ahead of time. This way you can just defrost them when you need a good, healthy meal. You can find some good ideas at <http://thrivinghomeblog.com/healthy-recipes-index/healthy-freezer-meals-recipes/> and <http://www.tasteofhome.com/recipes/cooking-style/freezer-meal-recipes>. Many of the meals you typically make are probably possible to freeze as well.
- ✓ Ask a friend or relative to set up a meal train for you at <http://www.mealtrain.com/>. Once your baby is born, they can send it to other friends and family and everybody can sign up to drop meals off on different days. You can even request that meals just be left by your front door if you're not ready for visitors right away.
- ✓ Prepare your partner to support you by giving him/her ideas now. Ask him/her to try to be aware of refilling your water glass, offering you snacks, and bringing you meals. You may find that you have trouble focusing on eating and asking for what you need, so an alert and aware partner can be incredibly helpful!
- ✓ Stock your fridge and pantry now with tasty and healthy snacks like fruit, nuts, granola, hard-boiled eggs, yogurt, and smoothie ingredients. You might even put up a list on your fridge reminding you of your choices so it's easier to find and grab something when you're hungry.
- ✓ Stash snacks in areas that you might spend a lot of time postpartum, like your nightstand or an end table in your living room.

Notes:

Day 4

Prepare for Birth: Your birthing space

Today's Date:

What do people need to birth? What do you need to birth?

We often underestimate the crucial role that hormones play in helping with the physiological progression of labor. In order for these important hormones to be released most effectively, and not interfered with, birthing people need to feel safe, loved, and supported. Whether you're birthing in a hospital, birth center, or at home, you'll want to put some thought into creating a space that feels safe and comfortable for your birth. Remember that even if your birthing space ends up being less than ideal, the people around you can help wrap you in a warm cocoon and protect your space. Thinking intentionally about the physical space in which you'll birth is a great idea!

To Do:

- ✓ Answer the following questions to help you decide how you'd like to create your ideal birthing space:
 - What are your favorite aromas?
 - What do you want to be able to look at during labor? How would you like the lighting to be?
 - What noise level will help you feel most safe and comfortable?
 - Do you want music on during your labor? If so, what kind?
 - Are there any special items you'd like to have with you to see, use, or hold while in labor?
- ✓ Based on your answers to the questions above, list any items that you want to gather to create your birthing space.
- ✓ Add any details about how you'd like to set up the space. Think about who will do this for you when baby's birthday comes and be sure to share this information with them!

*If you are giving birth in a hospital, here are a few tips to help ease your transition from home to hospital room and create a nurturing, comfortable environment in your hospital room:

- Bring your own favorite pillows and blankets (don't use a white pillowcase or you might confuse your pillow with hospital pillows when you're heading home!)
- Wear your own clothing, even while laboring at the hospital
- Make sure that your birth partner is prepared to answer questions asked by the medical staff for you if you're in active labor - your partner should do whatever he/she can to help protect your space and keep you focused
- Have your partner find the lighting and keep it low and soft (battery-operated candles are a great birth bag addition)
- Get your music, aromas, visual focal points set up in the room as soon you can
- Bring and display birth affirmations that you and/or friends and family have prepared ahead of time

Notes:

Day 5

Nourish Yourself: Relaxation ritual

Today's Date:

For some, preparing to give birth can cause anxiety or overwhelm. You may also find moments of anxiety during your postpartum period and later parenting years. Now is a wonderful time to think about and try to create a relaxation ritual to help you in those tougher moments.



To Do:

- ✓ Think about what helps you to feel relaxed now. Is it deep breathing, a cup of tea, getting outside into nature, a particular aroma, a warm bath, music?
- ✓ Think about ways you can apply the actions that relax you to different settings:
 - Birth
 - Postpartum
 - Parenting
 -
- ✓ Journal about your ideas to help you be prepared to return to your relaxation ritual when you need it.
- ✓ Take opportunities to practice your relaxation ritual when you need to during these next few weeks.

Notes:

Day 6

Baby Love: Memories

Today's Date:

With new babies come milestones and mementos. Most parents want to keep track of the big changes and small items, but if you don't have a system in place it can be challenging to stay organized.

To Do:

- ✓ Think about what you want to keep track of and consider your options:
 - Baby book
 - Small box for keepsakes
 - Set up an email address for your child so you can send thoughts, jot down memories, and send pictures over the years

- ✓ You can keep it simple for now and think about ways to present it or make it look pretty later. For now, just make sure you have a system that will work for you.

Notes:



Day 8

Build your Confidence: Birth stories

Today's Date:

There is a narrative of fear surrounding birth in our mainstream culture. You may have experienced the warning messages from others during your pregnancy. Perhaps it's been comments about how painful labor is or responses to your birth plan, questioning your sanity for attempting to avoid using pain medications (if that's your plan). It's OK to be realistic – labor is painful for many people. However, what you don't often hear about are the beautiful, life-changing moments during labor and birth and the amazing strength that people have when birthing their babies. Try as hard as you can to surround yourself with positive birth stories as you anticipate your birthing day and shield yourself from the negative if you can.

To Do:

- ✓ Read birth stories. One great place to find some is <http://birthwithoutfearblog.com/category/bwf-topics/birth-stories/>.
- ✓ Seek out people close to you who you would expect might share positive stories about their births and ask to hear them. Explain to them that you're working hard to build your confidence as you approach your baby's birth.

Notes:

Day 9

Plan for Postpartum Wellness: Physical recovery

Today's Date: _____

Regardless of your birth experience, there will be an adjustment period afterwards in which your body is recovering from the hard work of giving birth. There are some supplies that you can gather and make ahead of time to help you have a smoother recovery after your baby is born.

To Do:

- ✓ Gather the following:
 - Witch hazel
 - Maxi pads – find very absorbent ones
 - Nipple cream – Lansinoh (<https://www.lansinoh.com/products/hpa-lanolin>), Motherlove (<https://www.motherlove.com/product/nipple-cream>), and Earth Mama Angel Baby (<http://earthmamaangelbaby.com/products/natural-nipple-butter>) are good choices
 - Herbs for a sitz bath (calendula, chamomile, st. john's wort, lavender). These can be ordered from <https://www.mountainroseherbs.com/>. You can also buy premade sitz bath herbs at <http://earthmamaangelbaby.com/products/postpartum-bath-herbs>.
- ✓ Make soothing witch hazel pads
 - Soak pads in witch hazel (you can add a few drops of aloe vera gel and/or lavender oil if you want to). I like to put the mixture in squirt bottle or spray bottle and then apply it to the pad. Put the pads in tin foil or Ziploc bags and put in the freezer. You can use these to help soothe your perineum for the first few days postpartum.
- ✓ Make an herbal sitz bath to help with healing and relaxation. This is especially great if you experience tearing during birth.
 - Mix 1.5 cups calendula, ½ cups chamomile, ½ cup st. john's wort, and ¼ cup lavender and store in an airtight jar.
- ✓ Refer to the following instructions when you're ready to take an herbal bath after baby is born.
 - Steep ½ cup of the mixture in 3 quarts of boiling water for about 20 minutes.
 - Strain the herbs out and add the steeped water to your bath.
 - Even if you are recovering from a Cesarean, this bath will be relaxing and soothing.
 - PLEASE CHECK WITH YOUR CARE PROVIDER TO BE SURE THIS IS SAFE FOR YOU BASED ON YOUR PERSONAL SITUATION.

Notes:

Day 10

Prepare for Birth: Use your BRAIN

Today's Date:

BRAIN is a favorite acronym among birth professionals. Closely related to informed consent and refusal (which we'll talk about later), it is an incredibly useful tool in helping you obtain all the information you need to consent to or refuse medical treatments during pregnancy, labor, birth and postpartum.

Here's how you can use the acronym when presented with the option of a certain treatment or decision during labor:

- B: Ask, "What are the **benefits** of this treatment/procedure?"
- R: Ask, "What are the **risks** of this treatment/procedure?"
- A: Ask, "What are some **alternatives** to this treatment/procedure?"
- I: Think about and discuss with your birth team what your **instinct** and **intuition** are telling you to do.
- N: Ask, "What if we do **nothing** right now and re-evaluate in X amount of time?" This question can often be preceded by the questions, "Is my baby healthy and OK at this moment? Am I OK at this moment?"
- Use the answers to all of these questions to make a decision about how to proceed.

To Do:

- ✓ Review BRAIN with your partner.
- ✓ Pack the Critical Decision-Making printable (p. 35) in your hospital bag or have it handy for your home birth.

Notes:

Day 11

Nourish Yourself: Pamper!

Today's Date:

Pregnancy, especially the final days, can be busy as you prepare to greet your new baby. It can also seem to drag on if you approach or pass your estimated due date. Whether you're feeling busy and overwhelmed or anxious and ready for your baby to be born, a day (or even just an hour) of pampering can be just the thing to lift your spirits!

To Do:

- ✓ Book yourself an appointment to be pampered; think prenatal massage, facial, manicure, pedicure, belly henna, belly casting, etc.
- ✓ If these ideas don't fit into your schedule or budget, try doing something at home; think long bath with essential oils, massage from your partner, a cup of tea and a long chat with a good friend, etc.

Notes:

Day 12

Baby Love: Plan for the early days with baby

Today's Date:

Your instincts will guide you as you care for your child. However, it's also OK if you feel a little unsure about things at first. It's a good idea to gather some resources now so you can easily access them when your newborn comes along.

To Do:

- ✓ Take a look at books and websites on newborn care and skim through some of the information to see what resonates most with you. *The Baby Book* by Dr. Sears is a good book on newborn behavior and his website is at <http://www.askdrsears.com/>.
- ✓ Create some parenting mantras and write them down or even post them around the house. (e.g. "this too shall pass," "baby is asking to be close to me right now," "let it go," or "we'll give this a try and it may not work, but that's ok").
- ✓ Chat with your partner about your expectations of the first few weeks of parenting. Come up with ways that he/she can support you in caring for the baby.
- ✓ Assemble baby supplies close by rather than in another room or on another level of your house. You're not going to be able to run up and downstairs to use the fancy changing table in the early weeks. Just keep some diapers, wipes, change of clothes nearby so you have things on hand.
- ✓ Think now about scheduling some breaks for yourself. Even if it's 5 minutes to read or 20 minutes to take a bath. You need time to be alone and recharge.

Notes:

Day 13

Prepare for Birth: Cesarean crash course

Today's Date:

Most people don't want to talk about or think about the possibility of their birth ending in a Cesarean. And I understand that. In fact, I skipped past every mention of C-section in anything I read until I was 36 weeks pregnant with a baby that was breech. And even then, I didn't know enough about how to find the information I needed to help my experience be as gentle and positive as possible.

My experience has led me to believe that it's so important for every mother to at least understand the basics of Cesareans as well as what they can do to work with their birth team for a gentle, compassionate experience if a Cesarean becomes necessary.

Some people will argue that sharing this information about compassionate cesareans will make mothers think that cesareans are risk-free and easy and encourage them to more quickly accept having one. Cesareans are a form of major surgery and they come with very real risks and extended recovery time for mothers. However, the reality is that 1 in 3 babies are born by Cesarean in our country (WHO (the World Health Organization) recommends a rate of 10-15%) and families should be aware of their options should this become a reality for them.

To Do:

- ✓ Read this story of a compassionate elective cesarean birth <http://birthwithoutfearblog.com/2013/04/09/compassionate-elective-cesarean-birth-photographers-point-of-view/>.
- ✓ Read this list of ways to have a positive cesarean birth experience: <http://empoweredbirthpa.org/2012/05/cesarean-birth-plan/>.
- ✓ Think about what you might like to add to your birth plan (and have your partner help you advocate for in the moment) in the case of a cesarean.
- ✓ Update your birth plan to reflect your thoughts (you could even just have this written out and in your birth bag just in case).
- ✓ Locate your local chapter of ICAN (International Cesarean Awareness Network) by going here: <http://www.ican-online.org/united-states-chapters/>. ICAN is a wonderful resource for mothers who have had Cesareans. If you have this information now, it will save you some work if you need it after your baby is born.
- ✓ Don't focus too much energy on the possibility of a Cesarean, but know that you have the information you need now and move on with confidence and excitement for your upcoming birth experience!

Notes:

Day 14

Build your Confidence: Birth art

Today's Date:

Birth art allows us to communicate our thoughts, emotions, fears, and dreams about our birth experiences in a way other than spoken or written language. When we draw, we tap into a different part of our brains. In her book, *Birthing from Within*, Pam England writes, "Birth art doesn't have to be pretty, colorful or carefully planned. It is as raw, honest, and spontaneous as birth itself."

The idea of sitting down and creating art related to your upcoming birth might be intimidating or unappealing to you if you don't create art in your daily life. I know it was for me at first. But there are many potential benefits. It can uncover for you some of your preconceived ideas about birth. It can inspire you to seek the type of support that you need for your birth experience. It can help connect you to your baby and simply give you time to reflect on what your inner voice is telling you about your upcoming birth.

To Do:

- ✓ For very detailed instructions and ideas, check out *Birthing From Within*, pages 33 – 75 (especially 37-40 for simple drawing ideas). The steps below are loosely based on the ideas in this book.
- ✓ Gather a few supplies – nice paper, crayons, markers, pastels, paint, colored pencils, or clay.
- ✓ Decide if you want to do this alone, with a friend, or your partner/doula.
- ✓ First, sit and quiet your mind.
- ✓ Use the following ideas to get you started:
 - How do you see yourself as a pregnant person?
 - What's your fantasy about giving birth?
 - Create an image that will help your body relax and open
 - What animal do you associate with easy birthing?
 - What is happening inside your womb?
 - What fears do you hold onto about your birth?
 -
- ✓ Start drawing/painting, sculpting. You might choose to play music in the background while you do this.
- ✓ Look at your art and reflect on what you've made.
 - Think about the feelings invoked in your art.
 - Is there anything puzzling that you want to explore further?
 - Talk about your art with your birth partner if you'd like.
- ✓ Save your art and consider having it in your birthing space while you're in labor.

Day 15

Plan for Postpartum Wellness: Local resources

Today's Date:

It's hard to know exactly what type of support you'll need after your baby is born. However, it's clear that having a solid support network in place is crucial to a healthy postpartum period. Now is a good time to identify local resources and compile a list for yourself so that you don't have to do the research when you're busy with your new baby.

To Do:

- ✓ Find contact information for local breastfeeding support:
 - Search <http://www.llli.org/webus.html> for your local La Leche League
 - Find some lactation consultants in your area

- ✓ Search <http://www.ican-online.org/find-a-chapter/> for your local ICAN (International Cesarean Awareness Network) group in case you have a cesarean section.

- ✓ Identify local postpartum doulas and even consider hiring one ahead of time to help you have a smoother postpartum transition:
 - Learn about my postpartum support packages at <http://www.taylordaviddoula.com/postpartum-services/>
 - Search www.doulamatch.net for local doulas

- ✓ Create a list with information for all for all of the above and keep it handy somewhere (or fill it in on my postpartum wellness plan at [http://www.taylordaviddoula.com/postpartum-wellness-toolkit-optin/.](http://www.taylordaviddoula.com/postpartum-wellness-toolkit-optin/))

Notes:

Day 16

Prepare for Birth: Encourage optimal fetal positioning

Today's Date:

An optimally positioned baby can help you have an easier and less painful labor. The optimal position for a baby is anterior. Anterior means that the baby is head down, with his or her back and back of the head against your tummy. This position is favorable because the top of baby's head will put even pressure on your cervix during labor, helping it open and release important labor hormones. Also, the smallest part of baby's head will be born first, allowing for a more gentle birth. Furthermore, a posterior baby (baby's face and tummy are against your tummy) can push against your back during labor, leading to more painful contractions felt mostly in your back and often a longer and harder pushing stage. While some people may not experience posterior labor as especially challenging, it's absolutely worth it to do what you can to encourage your baby into an anterior position for labor and delivery.

To Do:

✓ For these final days of pregnancy, focus on resting positions that keep your womb balanced:

- Sit with your hips higher than your knees
- As much as possible, try not to recline backwards into the couch or your chair
- Sit backwards on a chair to avoid reclining
- Sit on a birth ball while working or watching TV (like this: http://www.amazon.com/Pregnancy-Ball-Purple/dp/B00H22Z82O/ref=sr_1_4?ie=UTF8&qid=1419867729&sr=8-4&keywords=birth+ball)
- Sit on a pillow on the floor
- Sleep on your side, not your back

✓ If you're curious or interested, try belly mapping to figure out what position your baby is in:

<http://spinningbabies.com/baby-positions/belly-mapping>.

Notes:

Day 17

Nourish Yourself: Yoga nidra

Today's Date:

Yoga Nidra means yogic sleep and it is a state of conscious deep sleep. It can be incredibly relaxing and is a wonderful tool to use to center your mind and body as you prepare for birth.

To Do:

- ✓ Go to <http://www.yoniyogabirth.com/yoga-nidra.html> and scroll to the bottom of the page.
- ✓ Listen to the first audio track for instructions on the yoga nidra.
- ✓ Do the yoga nidra with the second audio track.

Notes:

Day 18

Baby Love: Sleeping space

Today's Date:

It's a good idea to think intentionally about where your baby will sleep for the first few weeks and months. There are different options and you'll want to think carefully about what will feel best for you, also keeping in mind that your plans may change once baby arrives. It's really important to remember that newborns and infants are not biologically meant to sleep through the night for many, many months. At first, babies don't even have an understanding of night or day, but sleep in chunks throughout the day and night. Mainstream American society has different expectations and these ideas can really set parents up to feel like something is going wrong if baby isn't sleep in long stretches.

To Do:

- ✓ Research your options. Your newborn could sleep in a bassinet next to your bed, in a co-sleeper that sidecars to your bed, or in your bed.
- ✓ If you plan to bedshare at all, review safe co-sleeping guidelines. If your baby is waking every couple hours around the clock for feeding, you might get more rest if you are close to him/her. By co-sleeping you may be able to feed on your side and not have to wake up as much for feedings. You may find baby sleeps better when she's close to you, thereby sleeping a little longer, and that your mind is more at ease having her close by. Read safe cosleeping guidelines here: <http://cosleeping.nd.edu/safe-co-sleeping-guidelines/>.
- ✓ If you plan to chestfeed, consider taking a look at the book, *Sweet Sleep*, by Diane Weissinger, Diana West, Linda J. Smith, and Teresa Pitman. This research-based book is a great guide and is the first that really focuses on sleep in chestfeeding families.

Notes:

Day 19

Prepare for Birth: Hold some ice

Today's Date:

There are so many ways to think about coping with new and sometimes painful sensations during labor and birth. What worked for your friend might not work for you. And what you think might work for you, might in fact change when you're in labor. But it's great to have an idea of different options and to even think about which ones you'll be more likely to try. There's no better way to figure this out and to practice using these techniques than simulating discomfort during pregnancy! *Birth from Within* author, Pam England, suggests an activity in which you hold ice in your hand and try different coping techniques.

To Do:

- ✓ Hold an ice cube in your hand for 60 seconds (about the length of a typical contraction). You can ask your partner to hold it behind your ear(s) for an even greater challenge.
- ✓ Each time you do this, practice a different coping technique:
 - Focus on your breathing and try not to let your mind wander
 - Use imagery and visualize with each breath (flower opening, pelvis opening, waves crashing, etc.)
 - Practice non-focused awareness by paying attention to all of your senses and noticing things in your environment. Try to notice without thinking or judging.
 - Have your partner talk to you through the "contraction"
 - Have your partner remain silent through the contraction
 - Use any other coping technique that you'd like
- ✓ As you try these different techniques, take note of which ones are most helpful for you.
- ✓ If you'd like, do this ice exercise a few more times during pregnancy, practicing the techniques you like the most.
- ✓ For more detailed instructions and ideas, check out pages 214-226 in *Birth from Within* by Pam England and Rob Horowitz.

Notes:

Day 20

Build your Confidence: Confront your fears

Today's Date:

It's common to have some fear surrounding your upcoming birth regardless of whether or not you have had an easy pregnancy. I think it's especially common in our culture because there's a pervasive narrative of pain and fear related to childbirth. It's crucial that pregnant people explore their fears and don't push them aside or try to ignore them. I find that when we try to ignore or minimize them, our fears often surface more assertively during labor.

To Do:

- ✓ Write down all of your worries and all the things you hope won't happen.
- ✓ Let yourself really think about and explore them.
- ✓ Get informed. Sometimes gathering information can alleviate fears.
- ✓ Decide what you need to do to manage and handle the fears that remain. Think about what you need to have a birth space that helps you feel safe. Think about how you might recover if your fears do ultimately come true.
- ✓ Follow through and get the support you need to confront your fears. A great first step is discussing your thoughts with your partner and/or doula.

Notes:

Day 21

Plan for Postpartum Wellness: Make a feeding station

Today's Date:

I'm a big supporter of going minimalist and not buying every baby product on the market. You never know exactly what you're going to need and dealing with less stuff can actually make your postpartum days a little bit simpler. However, a few basic things will come in handy during those early days, especially a collection of needed items near the spot where you plan to feed your baby. Making this ahead of time will save you the work once baby has arrived.

To Do:

✓ Gather some or all of the following:

- A water bottle or cup for yourself
- A journal
- Pens
- Blank thank you cards
- A book
- Trail mix, nuts, or dried fruit
- Chocolate
- Burp cloths
- Nipple cream
- A couple of diapers and wipes
- Basket or container with a handle

✓ Arrange these items in the basket.

✓ Place them where you think you'll be spending a lot of time feeding your baby. You can carry the basket with you to your bedroom at night too.

Notes:

Day 22

Prepare for Birth: Take Charge

Today's Date:

You may experience a range of emotions during labor. At times you may feel strong and in control. At other times you may feel tired or weary. You may feel exhilarated and excited to meet your baby. And you may have times when you are scared and want to give up. It is during these intense and/or scary moments that your support team can help you regain your strength and find renewed energy for the rest of labor. Penny Simkin's *Take Charge Routine* is incredibly helpful for partners and birth support team members.

To Do:

- ✓ Read Penny's *Take Charge Routine*: http://www.dancingstarbirth.ca/Handouts/Take_Charge_Routine.pdf.
- ✓ Ask your partner and anybody else on your support team to read it (your doula will be familiar with it).
- ✓ Talk with your partner about it and make sure he/she is ready to take charge if needed.
- ✓ Print it out and pack it in your hospital bag/have it ready in your home for a home birth.

Notes:

Day 23

Nourish Yourself: Get out of dodge

Today's Date:

You are in the midst of your final days without your new baby. This might be the last time for a while that you can go out and do some of the things you love doing.

To Do:

- ✓ Plan a really fun outing. You can go alone or include your partner or somebody else special. Here are some ideas:
 - Go out for a nice, fancy dinner
 - Go for a hike
 - Go explore a new place nearby that you haven't been to yet
 - Go see a play or a movie

Notes:



Day 24

Baby Love: Babywearing

Today's Date:

Babies love to be close to their caregivers. Using a wrap or carrier to keep baby close can be a great way to soothe him/her when nothing else seems to work. Keeping baby close in the early days also promotes frequent feeding and can help establish a healthy chestfeeding relationship. Even if you're not chestfeeding, your baby will enjoy this time snuggling close to you. As you become more experienced with it, you may also find that you can get some things done around the house while having your baby in a wrap or a carrier.

To Do:

- ✓ Check out <http://www.babywearinginternational.org/> for tons of information on babywearing.
- ✓ Search for a local babywearing group in your area.
- ✓ Consider if you'd like to buy or borrow a wrap or carrier. Some babywearing groups even have a lending library so that you could try a few carriers or wraps before making a purchase.

Notes:

Day 25

Prepare for Birth: Informed Consent & Refusal

Today's Date:

Informed consent is something that I discuss with all of my birth clients. Understanding your rights and understanding the essence of *true* informed consent will make it possible for you to gather evidence-based information and remain autonomous as you stay in control of the decisions being made during your pregnancy, labor, and birth.

ACOG, (The American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists) states, "The Obstetrician-Gynecologist has an obligation to obtain the informed consent of each patient" (2011). Hermione Hayes-Klein, Human Rights Lawyer and Director of Human Rights in Childbirth (<http://humanrightsinchildbirth.com/>), lays out for doctors and midwives what informed consent in birth care should look like. If you want to be sure that your provider is practicing true informed consent, look for these 3 components in your conversations and care.

- Your provider should **inform** you about what is happening and objectively share *all* the risks and benefits of *all* of your options. This part of the conversation should be objective and supported by evidence.
- Next, your provider should **advise** you. This is when he/she can take into account your personal situation, his/her limits and skills, and give suggestions for what he/she thinks you should do. This part of the conversation can be subjective.
- Finally, your provider should **support** you. This means that, even if you choose not to follow his/her suggestions, he/she should support your decision, knowing that you have been given all the information.

You should always be the decision-maker in your pregnancy and birth care. You should decide what risks and benefits are tolerable to you because you are the one who will live with the outcome. If you make a choice that is different than your provider's suggestion, it might help to let him/her know that you understand the responsibilities that accompany your right to choose.

To Do:

- ✓ Read this quick blurb about your right to informed consent from Human Rights in Childbirth: <http://humanrightsinchildbirth.com/right-to-informed-consent/>.
- ✓ Read this quick blurb about your right to refuse medical treatment from Human Rights in Childbirth: <http://humanrightsinchildbirth.com/right-to-refuse-medical-treatment/>.
- ✓ Make sure that you and your partner understand true informed consent and refusal before labor day comes. This information, and your ability to use, may be very helpful in the face of tough decisions during the end of pregnancy, labor, and birth.
- ✓ Pack the Critical Decision-Making printable (p. 35) in your hospital bag or have it handy for your home birth.

Notes:

Day 26

Build Your Confidence: More affirmations

Today's Date:

Hopefully you've hung some affirmations around your house and begun to look at them periodically throughout your day! Now is the time to gather some words and mementos from the important people in your life so you'll feel their support when you're in labor.

To Do:

- ✓ Identify friends and family who you think would have genuine words of encouragement for you as you anticipate your labor and birth experience.
- ✓ Write them a quick email asking them to either respond with a few encouraging words that you can view during the end of your pregnancy and during labor or to mail you a note/memento that you can include as part of your birth environment.
- ✓ Gather the notes and mementos and display them where they can encourage you during these last days of pregnancy and during labor and birth.

Notes:

Day 27

Plan for Postpartum Wellness: Choose an SOS person Today's Date:

I keep reiterating the importance of social support to help you have a smoother and gentler transition during your postpartum days. It's so important to have people who you can call on to help you with tasks as well as just listen to your challenges and/or concerns.

To Do:

- ✓ Think about somebody in your life who you could call during a challenging postpartum moment. This person should fit the following guidelines:
 - They will actively listen to you
 - They will not minimize what you're feeling or tell you that everything is fine
 - They will not judge you for sharing your thoughts and feelings
- ✓ Call this person now and let them know that you're hoping to be able to reach out to them during tough postpartum moments. Share your hopes with them about how they can support you.
- ✓ Make a commitment to follow through and call them when you need to after baby is born.

Notes:

Day 28

Prepare for Birth: Comfort measures

Today's Date:

It is likely that your body will know what to do when you're in labor to help you be as comfortable as possible. The best thing you can do is listen to what your body is telling you to do. It's great to also have an idea of physical comfort measures that you might like to use if you're feeling stuck or need a change when in labor.

To Do:

- ✓ Read the article titled *Comfort in Labor: How you can help yourself to a normal, satisfying childbirth* at this page: <https://www.pennysimkin.com/articles-resources/>. Focus especially on pages 4 - 7.
- ✓ Practice the positions with your partner to see what might feel best for you and to develop familiarity with them.
- ✓ Print out the article and put it in your birth bag for quick reference during labor.
- ✓ For more information for your birth partner, check out the book, *The Birth Partner* by Penny Simkin.

Notes:

Day 29

Nourish Yourself: Find your people

Today's Date:

Social support and a sense of community with peers who are at the same life stage as you is really helpful as you pursue a healthy postpartum transition. While it may take time to find your people, or group of parents you truly connect with, you can get a head start now!

To Do:

- ✓ Do research on facebook and local forums to see if you can find any groups or events for new parents. You might do a google search, ask friends, ask your care provider, and reach out to your local birth community (doulas, childbirth educators, etc.).
- ✓ Join the online groups and forums now if you can and start chatting.
- ✓ Take note of dates that various new mother/baby groups will meet so that you will know where to go once you're ready to attend.

Notes:

Day 30

Baby Love: Write a letter to your baby

Today's Date:

I'm sure there are so many thoughts swirling around in your mind about your new baby. You probably have hopes and wishes for him or her before you've even seen his/her face. There's so much to be excited about!

To Do:

- ✓ Write a letter to your baby. Tell him/her everything you're excited about and share anything else you want.
- ✓ Put the letter in a baby book or a special box where you plan to keep other mementos.
- ✓ You might also consider setting up an email address for your child and sending your letter that way. Then, as your child grows, you can continue to send little thoughts and pictures for him/her to access someday.

Notes:

Critical Decision-Making

Use your BRAIN

Benefits

Risks

Alternatives

Intuition

Not now

True Informed Consent and Refusal (Hayes-Klein)

Your provider should...

Inform

- Tell you what is happening
- Share all the evidence-based risks and benefits objectively

Advise

- Give suggestions based on skills, experience, your health situation, etc.
- (This portion can be subjective)

Support

- Ask you for your decision
- Support your decision regardless of his/her preference