

**THE FOUR THINGS YOU ACTUALLY
NEED TO KNOW TO PREPARE FOR A**

PHYSIOLOGIC ("NATURAL") BIRTH

The ultimate fluff-free guide, jam-packed with evidence-based information and practical strategies to get the safe and empowering undisturbed birth of your dreams.

WITH DR. JESSICA HODGENS

HEY MAMA,

Welcome to the Wild Mother community!

In my experience as a childbirth and parenting educator, most of the mamas I work with (not all, but the vast majority) want to birth their babies “naturally”, without drugs and interventions. And research supports this preference - midwifery experts agree that this type of birth is more likely to be safe and healthy for mothers and babies because it doesn't involve any unnecessary intervention that would disrupt their normal bodily processes



What's more, the vast majority of women are **capable** of having a physiologic birth. Research from around the world tells us that around 85% of women are capable of giving birth without interventions.

But despite all this, only a very small percentage of women in “developed” countries today actually birth their babies without pharmaceuticals or interventions.

So why is that? And how can you maximise your chances of having a safe and empowering physiologic birth? Well, mama, if you've been wondering the answer to these questions, then you're in exactly the right place, because I'm about to break it all down for you. By the end of this guide you'll be resourced with everything you need to know to have the birth you dream of - without the (mis)information overload you'll get from searching all over the internet.

Ready, mama? Let's dive in!

Dr Jessica Hodgens

WILD MOTHER MENTOR



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www.jessicahodgens.com

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

In this ultimate guide to having a safe and empowering physiologic birth, I'm going to give you the **four things** you actually need to know to get the safe and empowering physiologic birth you dream of.

You'll find precisely zero fluff here. I'm tired of seeing mamas wasting their time with distracting, irrelevant and incorrect information and practices that don't **actually** make a difference to your likelihood of getting the physiologic birth you want.

So in this guide I'm giving you the **evidence-based information**, as well as the **practical strategies** that I know work, because these are the things that have supported me and the mamas I serve to have safe, beautiful, empowering physiologic births.

I know you're already feeling overwhelmed with information and advice right now, so my goal is to clear away the clutter for you and give you just the information you actually need. But don't worry, if you do feel called to dive deeper into anything contained in this guide, I've also included lots of links to further resources.

My invitation to you, mama, is to make this guide a beautiful, nurturing part of your birth preparation. Make yourself a pot of tea, curl up somewhere comfy, light a candle, and dive in with me to the magic of physiologic birth.



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ONE

Understand how physiologic birth works

Get ready mama, because in the following pages I'm going to give you a crash course in physiologic birth! I know you're already feeling a little (or a lot!) overwhelmed by the amount of information out there about birth - so in this guide, I'm giving you everything you need to know, and nothing you don't.

In this section we're going to cover:

1. What is physiologic birth
2. Why physiologic birth is the safest and healthiest way for most mothers and babies to birth
3. What women need to be able to birth our babies as safely and easefully as possible

I've kept things super simple in these pages - but don't worry, I've also got a few great resources lined up for you to check out next:

- Stick your headphones in, go for a walk, and have a listen to [this podcast episode](#) where I give a much more detailed (but still super easy-to-understand) rundown of the what, why and how of physiologic birth.
- If you're more of a reader, check out [this blog post](#) from me all about "What is physiologic ("natural") birth and how to have one".
- Don't just take my word for it - have a listen to [this podcast interview](#) with Dr Sarah Buckley (a leading expert on physiologic birth)
- And if you're ready to really dive deep, read Dr. Sarah's book "[Gentle Birth, Gentle Mothering](#)" (it's the number one book I recommend to every pregnant mama)

Ready to dive into it, mama?

1.1 WHAT IS PHYSIOLOGIC BIRTH?

A physiologic birth is one that's driven solely by the natural biological processes of the mother's and baby's bodies. In other words, it's a birth that doesn't involve any kind of pharmaceutical or surgical intervention.

In a physiologic birth:

- labour begins spontaneously (it isn't induced or augmented by drugs)
- the conditions surrounding the birthing mother promote effective labour (we'll talk about this more below)
- the baby and placenta are born vaginally
- the birth of the placenta happens naturally, without medication
- the mother and newborn are kept together and given skin-to-skin contact immediately after birth, and
- breastfeeding is initiated early after the birth of the baby

Our ancestors evolved over hundreds of millions of years to reproduce as safely and efficiently as possible. This physiological reality is our 'mammalian blueprint' for birth. I like to think of it as Mother Nature's grand design – a kind of map that gives us all the information we need to be able to birth our babies safely.

Dr. Sarah Buckley, an expert on physiologic birth, says:

“Giving birth is an innately instinctive act, hardwired into our brains and bodies through millions of years of mammalian evolution, and designed to ensure the best possible outcomes for mothers and babies.”

So the most important thing you need to know about birth is this: Just like sleeping, breathing and digesting, birth is a natural process that our bodies are designed to do without us even thinking about it, and it functions most safely and most easefully when it's undisturbed.

1 2

WHY PHYSIOLOGIC BIRTH IS THE SAFEST AND HEALTHIEST WAY FOR MOST MOTHERS AND BABIES TO BIRTH

Physiologic birth offers mothers and babies the smoothest, safest and most easeful transition from gestation to lactation (for mamas) and from womb to world (for babies), for two reasons:

1. First, because it avoids the **risks** associated with unnecessary interventions in birth
2. And second, because it offers myriad **benefits** to mama and baby.

In a physiologic birth, the hormones produced in both mama's and baby's bodies work together symbiotically (in other words, they work closely together and offer mutual benefits to both).

Here are just a few quick examples to illustrate the beautiful, magical symbiosis of physiologic birth - but if you're keen to learn more about this, don't forget to check out this blog post!

- After baby is born, mama will pick her baby up and instinctively place their head close to her left breast. This universal behaviour places baby as close as possible to mama's heart, and on her rising and falling chest – helping the newborn to regulate their cardiovascular and respiratory systems during the huge transition from womb to world.
- Mama's chest will automatically change temperature, either warming up or cooling down, to help baby regulate their temperature (yes, really! How cool is that?!).
- As baby crawls up towards mama's nipple, the movement of their legs on her stomach helps to massage mama's uterus, stimulating contractions. This helps the uterus to return to its pre-pregnancy state, and reduces the risk to mama of postpartum haemorrhage.

Can you think of a more beautiful, perfect, symbiotic design? (All of these processes, by the way, are disrupted in a birth that involves interventions and in which baby isn't immediately placed on mama's chest for skin-to-skin contact).

1 2 3

WHAT WOMEN NEED TO BE ABLE TO BIRTH OUR BABIES AS SAFELY AND EASEFULLY AS POSSIBLE

Like all animals, our bodies need certain things to be able to function effectively. To breathe, we need access to clean air. To fuel our bodies, we need access to nutritious food and clean water. And to birth our babies, we need to feel: private, safe and lovingly supported.

These three things are super important to understand, and we're going to come back to them again and again, so let's repeat them now. To birth our babies as safely and easefully as possible, women need to feel:

- Private
- Safe
- Lovingly supported

If women feel private, safe and lovingly supported, we'll produce exactly the right symphony of hormones at exactly the right moment to birth our babies as safely and efficiently as possible



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A really easy way to understand the conditions women need to birth is by comparing birth to sex. That's not such a crazy stretch as you might think – actually, the hormones that are necessary to birth a baby are exactly the same as the hormones necessary to have an orgasm.

Take a moment to think about the conditions you'd need to feel comfortable enough to have an orgasm. Would you want to be in a brightly lit room, where strangers in white coats keep walking in and out, nurses continuously interrupt you and your partner to take measurements of certain bodily functions, and you've been given a time limit?

Or would prefer to be somewhere familiar, like your own home, where you feel safe and private? Where you know you have all the time in the world, and won't be interrupted? Where you can light a few candles if that's your thing, put on some music if you feel like it, move around freely, make as much noise as you like?

Birth is just the same.

For birth, as with sex, women need to feel private, safe and lovingly supported

Okay, mama - now that you've had a taster, I KNOW you're gonna want to learn more about physiologic birth! Don't worry, I've got a couple of awesome resources lined up especially for you.

If you prefer to listen while someone explains things to you, head over and have a listen to [this podcast episode](#), where I give a much more detailed (but still super easy-to-understand) rundown of the what, why and how of physiologic birth.

And if you're more of a reader, check out [this blog post](#) from me all about "What is physiologic ("natural") birth and how to have one".

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TWO

How to choose a birth team who'll support you to get the birth you desire

Wow, mama - if you've made it this far, you already have the most important information you need to be able to birth your baby as safely and easefully as possible!

But now you're probably wondering how you can create the optimal conditions where your birth will be undisturbed, and where you'll feel private, safe and lovingly supported. Well, that's exactly what we're going to dive into now.

In this section, I'm going to tell you about THE most important decision you'll need to make to maximise your likelihood of having a safe and empowering physiologic birth - how to choose a birth team who'll support you to get the birth you desire. First we're going to talk about the options available to you, and then I'm going to give you ONE tip for low risk pregnancies, and THREE tips for high pregnancies.

Ready to go?

21 HOW TO CHOOSE A BIRTH TEAM THAT WILL SUPPORT YOU TO GET THE BIRTH YOU DESIRE

Choosing your care provider and birth team is one of the most important decisions you'll make in setting yourself up for a safe physiologic birth.

Why? Because your choice of **where** you birth your baby, and **who** you choose to support you, has a huge (HUGE) impact on your likelihood of having a physiologic birth.

There are lots of models of care available to choose from, including:

- At home with the support of a private midwife
- At home through a publicly funded homebirth program
- At home without any medical support (free birth)
- In a hospital or birth centre through a midwifery group practice
- In a public hospital
- In a private hospital

The overwhelming majority of women in “developed” countries give birth in hospitals, while only a tiny fraction (less than 1% in Australia) give birth at home.

What we know through research, however, is that women and babies who birth at home have the same or slightly better outcomes than women who birth in hospital in terms of perinatal mortality (likelihood of dying in the time around childbirth), and they have measurably better outcomes in terms of avoiding unnecessary interventions (remember that all interventions carry risks, so the more we can avoid unnecessary ones, the better).

For example, recent research in Australia found that women who birthed at home were six times more likely to experience a drug and intervention-free vaginal birth than women who birthed in hospital, while the perinatal mortality outcomes between the two groups were the same.

Why the difference?

When we understand the conditions that women need to be able to birth our babies safely (private, safe and lovingly supported), the answer is clear. Hospitals are not optimal environments to make women feel private, safe and lovingly supported. Where are women more likely to feel private, safe and lovingly supported? For most of us, that's at home with the support of the known and trusted care provider.

ONE TIP FOR LOW-RISK PREGNANCIES AND THREE TIPS FOR HIGH-RISK PREGNANCIES

My number one tip for low-risk pregnancies (and remember, mama, most pregnancies are low-risk) is:

Birth at home with the support of a private midwife.

For most of us who've grown up to fear birth, this can be a challenging concept to take on. When we think of birth, we think of hospitals. And for high-risk pregnancies, hospital can indeed sometimes be the better option. But most pregnancies aren't high-risk. And the research consistently confirms that for women with low-risk pregnancies, home is the safest place to give birth.

And what if your pregnancy does involve a higher level of risk? If that's the case, you may (or may not) decide that hospital is actually the safest place to give birth. Whatever you decide is totally okay mama, because now that you understand the conditions your body needs to birth safely and efficiently, you can take steps to help yourself feel private, safe and lovingly supported even in the hospital.

3 tips to help you feel private, safe and lovingly supported if you choose to birth in hospital:

- To help you feel **private**, try bringing an eye mask and headphones with you to the hospital. You can block out the room by putting your mask over your eyes, and tune out the noise by listening to a playlist of music you love.
- To help you feel **safe**, try bringing some familiar things (your own pillow, or maybe some essential oils that you love), keep the lights in the room turned way down low, and request only a minimum of people in the room at any one time
- To help you feel **lovingly supported**, I suggest hiring a doula. I can't emphasise this enough: I would strongly recommend any woman choosing to birth in the hospital to hire a doula.

THREE

How to safely and confidently navigate a minimal-intervention pregnancy

We've come so far mama - you've already learnt all about THE most important decision you'll need to make to prepare for a physiologic birth!

In this next section, I'm going to walk you through the other extremely important set of decisions you'll need to make to maximise your likelihood of having a safe and empowering physiologic birth. This set of decisions revolves around the kinds of routine tests and interventions that you'll be offered in your pregnancy. First we're going to talk about the routine interventions that you'll likely be offered. And then I'm going to give you the best decision-making tool I've ever learnt to help you make wise, empowered decisions for your and your baby's care.

Ready to dive in?

HOW TO SAFELY AND CONFIDENTLY NAVIGATE A MINIMAL-INTERVENTION PREGNANCY

The other important set of decisions you'll need to make during your pregnancy, that will strongly impact your likelihood of having a safe physiologic birth, involves the choices you make for routine tests and monitoring during your pregnancy.

Why is this so important? In short, because interventions tend to lead to more interventions. There's even a name for this: it's called the "cascade of interventions".

Many people make the mistake of assuming that the cascade of interventions begins when labour begins. Actually, it starts as early as the first trimester of pregnancy.

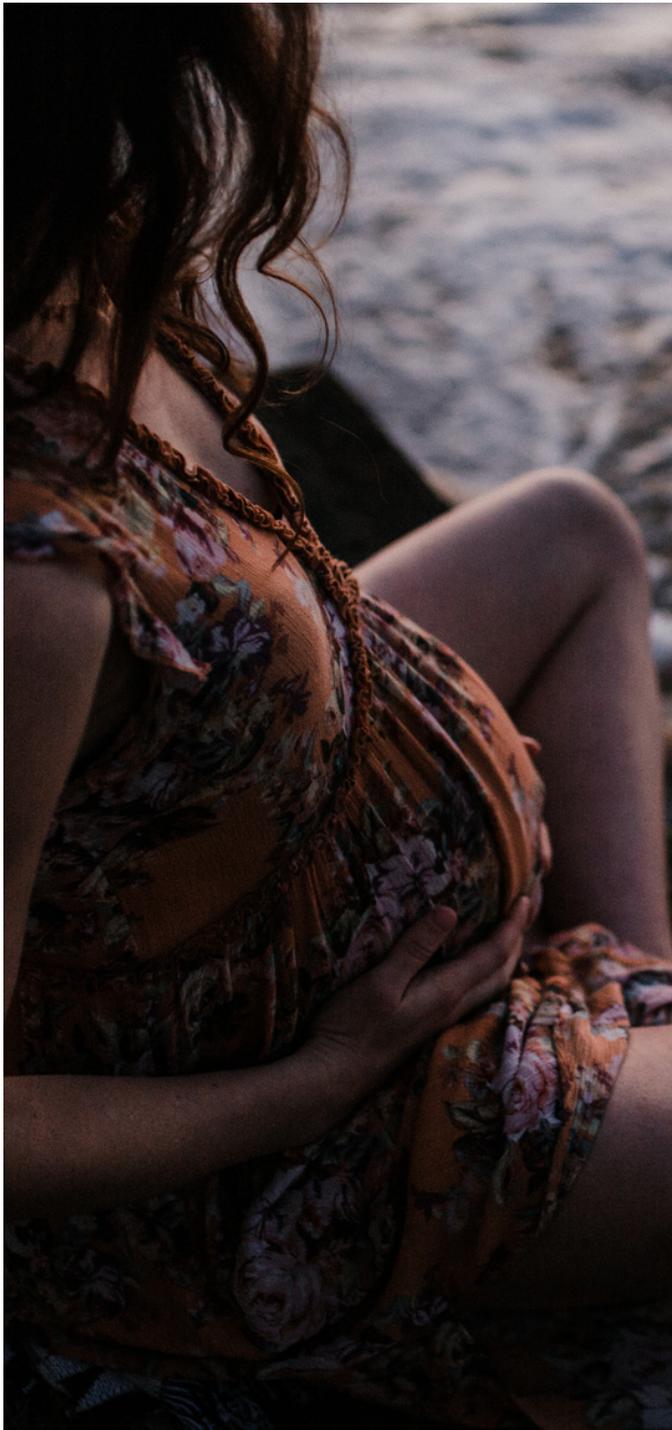
The two places I see the cascade of interventions starting are 1) at the very first ultrasound, and 2) at the 20 week gestational diabetes test. Why? Because being labelled with a diagnosis places you at much higher risk of having unwanted interventions.

That's why I strongly encourage you to do your own research on all the common tests and interventions you're likely to be offered during pregnancy. Because while these interventions can sometimes provide valuable information, they can also make or break your likelihood of having a physiologic birth.

Remember that every one of these options is just that – an option. Nothing is compulsory, and it's always your choice whether you accept or decline any or all of these.

To help you make these decisions, I suggest reading '[Gentle Birth Gentle Mothering](#)' by Dr Sarah Buckley, which explains the risks and benefits of common interventions. Some other excellent sources of information are the [Midwife Thinking](#) blog from Dr Rachel Reed,, and the library of Cochrane reviews (follow [this link](#) and select the ' pregnancy and childbirth' topic).

It's important to be aware that, in general, the modern maternity system sees birth not as physiology (the healthy functioning of a human body) but as pathology (illness in the human body).



However you choose to birth your baby, I encourage you to listen to [this podcast](#), which explains how and why our modern maternity system has developed in the way it has, and how different beliefs about our bodies and birth influence how different care providers approach pregnancy and birth.

The dominant belief that birth is pathology means that healthcare providers working within the system are much more likely to actively manage and intervene in pregnancy and birth - because they believe that this makes birth safer.

Some pregnancies and births do require a higher level of medical care, and we're fortunate to have access to this when we need it. But if your goal is to have a physiological birth, it's vital to know that this is **not** the default of the maternity system, so if you choose to birth in that system you'll need to be ready to advocate for your wishes.

If you're birthing in the hospital system, I also strongly encourage you to educate yourself about the common interventions that are likely to be offered to you, so that you're in a position to make informed decisions about whether these are the best choice for you and your baby. At a minimum, I suggest listening to [this podcast about induction](#), because you're very likely to be offered an induction if you birth in the hospital system, and this intervention often necessitates other interventions which may or may not be right for you.

3 2 USING YOUR BRAIN

When making decisions about any of the options available to you, including routine tests and monitoring, it's helpful to use the 'BRAIN' acronym.

B – Benefits – What are the benefits of the option for me and my baby? How might this positively impact me and my baby?

R – Risks – What are the risks of the option? How might this negatively impact me and my baby?

A – Alternatives – Are there any alternatives to this option? Are there other options that might have similar results?

I – Intuition – What does my gut tell me?

N – Nothing or Not Now – What happens if I do nothing? What happens if I wait?

As you do your research, I suggest taking a big sheet of paper, writing the option at the top of the page (e.g. 'Gestational Diabetes test'), then writing the letters 'B, R, A, I, N' down the left side of the page. Then as you research the option you can add dot points to each part of the acronym. Once you've filled out each section, you'll have a sense of all the pros and cons of the option, and hopefully a stronger idea of whether it's right for you and your baby.

FOUR

How to build your trust in your body, your baby and birth

We're nearly there, mama! If you've made it this far, you've got all of the information you need to maximise your likelihood of having a physiologic birth.

But because I know that many of us as women carry deep-seated fears and doubts about our ability to birth our babies without interventions (you're not alone if you feel this way mama, and no, it **isn't** a barrier to you having the birth you dream of), in the very last section I'm going to tell you a little about the "inner work" of pregnancy.

Because the fourth and final thing you need to know is how to build your trust in your body, your baby, and your birth.

Here we go!

4.1 HOW TO BUILD YOUR TRUST IN YOUR BODY, YOUR BABY AND BIRTH

The final piece of the puzzle in maximising your likelihood of having a safe physiologic birth is to put in the 'inner work' to build your trust in your body, your baby and birth. Here are my three tips to help you do just that.

1

Put up some boundaries keep out energies and stories that don't serve you

Pregnant bellies are a beacon for other people's stories, beliefs and experiences around birth! If someone is sharing stories or advice that doesn't feel supportive to you, try simply asking them not to share their story with you right now. "Can I just stop you there? Would you mind saving that story for after I have my baby please?". You can say this lightly and with a laugh – it might help the person to realise the inappropriateness of what they're saying and who they're saying it to!

2

Be selective in the kinds of birth stories you expose yourself to during your pregnancy

Your goal is to rewire your brain with the knowledge that birth is safe – so listening to lots of different types of birth stories in a culture where birth trauma is extremely common may not be helpful. Some of my favourite sources of positive birth stories are Ina May Gaskin's books, available [here](#) and [here](#). These books were my bible in the weeks leading up to the birth of my baby!

3

Bring awareness to the experiences, beliefs and patterns you hold about birth

All of us carry certain experiences, beliefs and patterns with us to our birth experience. These things come to us from a few different sources: from the beliefs about birth that have been passed to us by our communities, from the patterns that have been passed down to us through our maternal lines, and from our own experiences of certain rites of passage in our lives.

Each of these things will inevitably influence your experience of birth, but by bringing consciousness and awareness to them, you can use these things as a source of information and power, rather than allowing them to unconsciously perpetuate old patterns and beliefs that may not serve you.

Your go-to source to learn more about this is the one and only Jane Hardwicke Collings. I highly recommend [reading Jane's book](#), or listening to [this podcast interview](#) with her.





So... where to from here?

Mama, you've already traveled such a long way on one of the most rewarding and empowering journeys you'll ever take. You've armed yourself with information, and taken your birth into your own hands. I'm so excited for you and the beautiful, empowering physiologic birth that I have no doubt awaits you!

I hope the information contained in this guide helps to support you on your journey. But mama, I've got one last tip for you that I hope will support you. I want to you remember: you don't have to walk this path alone. There is a community of women just like you, who want to birth, mother and live with pleasure, purpose and power.

To feel connected, seen and inspired by this community of likeminded, brave-hearted, wild-souled women, come connect with me on [Instagram](#) or [Facebook](#), and tune into my podcast [The Wild Mother Podcast](#) - I'd so love to hear from you, and walk alongside you as you travel your own path through motherhood.

Jess xx

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WWW.JESSICAHODGENS.COM