

What is a Birth Center?

A birthing center is a healthcare facility, staffed by licensed midwives or nurse midwives, where mothers receive prenatal, labor, birth and postpartum care. The midwives monitor the labor and well-being of the mother and baby during birth. Should additional medical assistance be required the mother can be transferred to a hospital while someone from our staff will accompany and continue to advocate for mother and baby..

A birth center presents a more home-like environment than a hospital labor ward, typically with more freedom and options during labor: food/drink, music, and the attendance of family and friends if desired. Other characteristics can also include non-institutional décor and furniture such as queen-sized beds, large enough for both mother and father and birthing tubs or showers for water births. The decor is meant to emphasize the normality of birth. In a birth center, women are free to act more spontaneously during their birth, such as squatting, walking or performing other postures that assist in labor. Being active in labor is encouraged. The length of stay after a birth is shorter at a birth center; at most 6 hours after birth the mother and infant can go home.

Like clinics, birth centers arose on the coasts of the U.S. in the 1970s, as alternatives to heavily institutionalized health care. Today, the use of birth center facilities is covered by many health insurance policies. Several birthing practices that were innovated in birth centers are:

- Bathtubs or whirlpools for labor and/or birthing.
- Showers for mothers to labor in.
- Use of labor/birthing balls.
- Rooming in of the infant after birth.
- Beds for family members to stay with the mother during labor and birth.

There are certain requirements that a woman needs to meet in order to be able to birth at a birth center. First, she must have an uncomplicated, low-risk pregnancy. Certain conditions are not considered high risk according to the midwifery standard of care, such as maternal age or weight. It's best to discuss your risk diagnosis with a midwife to determine if you are a good candidate for a birth center birth. Free-standing birth centers have hospital backup in case complications arise during labor that requires more complex care. However, even if a delivery cannot happen at the birth center due to a high-risk pregnancy, birth center midwives will provide concurrent prenatal care to ensure that a mother gets the type of compassionate care that is possible through the midwifery model.