



having a
baby

If you are pregnant, especially with your first child, you may be feeling anxious and unsure about what will happen. You may be experiencing a range of mixed feelings about your pregnancy and all the changes that the birth of a child will bring.

This leaflet has been written to help you to know what to expect during your pregnancy, and where you can get more support and information. You may find that the maternity service closest to you can offer you other support. Your GP or hospital will be able to give you this information, so don't be afraid to ask.

Maternity care is divided into three phases:

1. **Antenatal care** – The healthcare you receive before the birth including classes to help prepare for your baby.
2. **The delivery** – This can be a hospital delivery or a home birth.
3. **Postnatal care** – The healthcare you receive after the birth for both you and your baby.

All expectant women living in Ireland are entitled to free public care during and after their pregnancy. This means that all of your antenatal visits, the delivery and postnatal care will be free of charge.

If you have private healthcare insurance you may use this to cover some of the costs of semiprivate or private care. You should contact your insurance provider to find out exactly what your insurance policy covers.

Confirming your pregnancy

If you think you are pregnant you can buy a pregnancy testing kit in any pharmacy or chemist. In most cases home tests are accurate. If you want to further confirm your pregnancy you can visit your GP or your nearest family planning centre.

Organising your maternity care

Once you have established that you are pregnant you will need to consider your maternity care. If you have been to your GP to confirm your pregnancy, they should have discussed your options for care with you. You need to decide which hospital to attend and whether you want to attend as a public, semi-private or private patient. Finally, you need to decide what maternity care scheme you would prefer. Any patient can avail of either scheme, provided you are medically suited. If you attend as a private or semi-private patient, there is a charge. You will need a letter of referral from your GP if you will be attending a maternity hospital or unit for maternity care.

There are two main options for maternity care available to you as a patient:

- **Maternity and Infant Child Scheme (The Combined Ante Natal Care Scheme)** – This is a scheme of combined care between your GP and the nearest maternity hospital or maternity unit. Most women attend the GP for six antenatal visits and two postnatal visits. They will also attend the hospital for six antenatal visits. Ask your GP for further details and an application form for the scheme. GP visits relating to the pregnancy are provided free of charge. The advantage of this scheme is that

you can book your GP visits at times that will suit you.

- **Hospital-based care only**

If you choose this option you will attend the hospital's antenatal clinic directly and be seen by a doctor, but you may not get to see the same doctor at every visit. You will also have two postnatal appointments to check both your health and your baby's health. Generally, you will have eight–ten antenatal appointments with your doctor or midwife during your pregnancy.

If you would like information on private care, contact your maternity hospital for further details.

Your first antenatal appointment

Your first antenatal appointment is very important. It generally takes place around Week 12. Your doctor or midwife will carry out the check:

- You will be asked about your medical history.
- You will be asked about your lifestyle.
- Your blood pressure will be taken.
- Routine blood tests will be taken.
- Your height and weight will be measured.
- Routine urine tests will be taken.
- You will also have an external examination of your stomach to check the size of the baby and your womb.

Before you attend your first antenatal visit make a list of questions or worries that you may have. Having the list will make things easier and means you won't forget anything. Your first checkup will probably be the longest. If you are feeling nervous it might help to bring a supportive friend with you. If you are attending a hospital it is a good idea to bring a

drink, a snack and something to do as you can be waiting a long time.

Scans

Ultrasound scans are used to see how the foetus is developing and are offered at 16–20 weeks, although this may vary depending on the hospital you attend. The scan is not painful. A gel is rubbed on your stomach and then a scanner is moved over your stomach. You will be able to see an image of the foetus on a monitor. You may also have a second scan at week 30.

Antenatal classes

Antenatal classes are generally available free of charge through the hospital you are attending, but you will have to book your place. The average number of classes is four–six. Some women attend on their own, while others bring their partner or a friend. Some classes are for pregnant women only so you may need to call the hospital to clarify these details. If this is your second pregnancy, you will probably meet with your midwife for a two-hour refresher class.

Topics generally covered in antenatal classes include:

- The development of the foetus during pregnancy
- Healthcare for expectant women
- Breathing exercises
- Relaxation exercises
- Exercises to prevent physical discomfort during pregnancy
- Going to hospital
- Labour and delivery
- Pain relief during labour
- Breastfeeding
- Parenting
- Caring for a new baby
- Childcare
- Returning to employment

Contact your maternity hospital or maternity unit, or ask your GP or midwife to find out about antenatal classes.

Support during pregnancy

Pregnancy can be a time of highs and lows. There are so many changes and so many decisions to be made. If your pregnancy has been difficult this can leave you feeling overwhelmed. Some women can experience depression during this time. Having someone with whom you are comfortable sharing your feelings is really important. While your friends and family may be great, there may be times when they cannot offer the support you need:

- Talk to your midwife or doctor about how you are feeling.
- Talk to the medical social worker at the hospital or attached to the maternity unit. They will have experience of working with women throughout pregnancy and can offer emotional support and practical assistance.
- Many local community groups and women's groups can be a source of support.
- You can also contact Cuidiú, The Irish Childbirth Trust which offers support, information and classes on pregnancy and childrearing.
Tel: 01 872 4501
Email: info@cuidiu-ict.ie
Web: www.cuidiu-ict.ie

Talk to your midwife or doctor about how you are feeling.

Counselling offers you a supportive and non-judgemental space to talk through what you are feeling or what is going on for you. Many Family Resource Centres and pregnancy counselling services offer low-cost and free counselling. For details of your nearest Family Resource Centre and for a copy of the *Support for Families Directory*, contact the Family Support Agency Tel: 01 611 4100. Details of pregnancy counselling services are available from the Crisis

Pregnancy Agency positive options website www.positiveoptions.ie or text the word 'List' to 50444.

If you attended crisis pregnancy counselling you can revisit your counsellor during your pregnancy and after the birth of your baby.

Fathers

Fathers have a major role to play in the development of their children. If you are not in a relationship with the baby's father it is a good idea to discuss in advance what will happen when the baby is born, how involved the father will be and whether it will be possible for you to co-parent. If you find communication difficult but possible, you can get help in discussing these issues from the Family Mediation Service.

Tel: 01 634 4320

For some people this may not be possible. Getting information on the legal issues involved in parenting is also important.

Contact the following organisations for further information:

- **AIM Family Services**
Tel: 01 670 8363
Email: aimfamilyservices@eircom.net
Web: www.aimfamilyservices.ie
- **Free Legal Advice Centre**
Tel: 01 874 5690
Email: info@flac.ie
Web: www.flac.ie
- **One Family**
Working with all one-parent families
askonefamily Helpline: 1890 66 22 12
Email: info@onefamily.ie
Web: www.onefamily.ie
- **Treoir** – The National Information Centre for Parents Who Are Not Married to Each Other. Treoir has produced a leaflet outlining the legal position of fathers in situations where parents are not married.
Tel: 1890 25 20 84
Email: info@treoir.ie
Web: www.treoir.ie

Going to hospital

What to bring

It's a good idea to pack two bags in advance of your stay in hospital. It is recommended that you do this by Week 36. The first bag is for the delivery and the second is for the remainder of your stay. Hospitals have a lot of people coming in and out so it is a good idea not to bring valuables such as jewellery or credit cards.

What to bring in your delivery bag:

- To wear – bathrobe, two night dresses (night dresses that open down the front with buttons are often easier to manage) socks, slippers
- Hairband, disposable pants, large maternity pads
- Toiletries – toothbrush, toothpaste, shampoo, deodorant etc
- Hand towel and two bath towels
- Extra pillow
- Massage oils or lotions
- Personal walkman, discman, iPod, book
- Something that makes you feel more at home – a picture, teddybear etc

What to bring in your second bag:

For yourself:

- Bathrobe – the bathrobe in your delivery bag may get stained
- Nightdresses or pyjamas
- Snacks
- Nursing bras, breast pads, maternity underwear, sanitary pads (maternity)
- Toiletries
- Mobile phone and charger
- Something to wear for going home – generally, you are still the size you were at five–six months pregnant.

For your baby:

- Blanket
- Clothes – vests, sleepsuits,

body suits, cardigan

- Towels
- Nappies
- Cotton wool balls
- Car seat (if you are taking your baby home in a car)

These are general items to bring. For a more specific list, contact the hospital.

Other children

If you are already parenting on your own, you will need to think about childcare arrangements for your children while you are in hospital and after you are discharged. Talk to family and friends well in advance to see how they can help you out, both for the time of delivery and in case you are kept in hospital after having the baby.

Transport

You will also need to think about how you are going to get to and from the hospital. Plan your transport well in advance to avoid panic on the day.

Going into hospital

When it is time for you to give birth, your baby will be delivered by midwives in the delivery unit. If there are problems during the birth, a doctor will attend you. After your baby is born, you will be put in a public ward. There will be a cot next to your bed for your baby. You will usually stay in hospital for three days. Visiting regulations are usually strict. If you need to stay for longer, this will also be free of charge. Some hospitals operate a system whereby mothers without complications can return home early. This is sometimes called the 'Early Transfer Home Scheme'. The scheme is only available in certain hospitals.

Feelings after the birth

It is common for women to feel elated once the baby is born and then sad and tearful around day three. These feelings are often generated by a drop

in hormone levels that were high during pregnancy. Your feelings should settle down after a few days and no treatment is needed.

For the first few weeks after the birth you may find that you are easily upset and irritable. These weeks are difficult. Your sleep pattern may be disturbed, the baby might not be in a routine yet, and perhaps you have other children to manage as well. It's a good idea to talk to your public health nurse who will visit you once you arrive home. They will understand what you are experiencing and will be able to offer support and practical guidance with any difficulties you are having. Support is also available through the Community Mothers Programme, which offers new parents support and advice from other parents. The programme is generally organised by your Health Service Executive area. Ask your public health nurse for further information on the programme.

Some women experience deep depression (postnatal depression) after their baby is born.

Symptoms include:

- Being tired all the time
- Feeling tense and anxious
- Feeling despairing and tearful
- Feeling inadequate
- Finding it hard to do day-to-day tasks

If you are feeling this way it is really important not to ignore your feelings.

There is support available to help you feel better:

- **Your public health nurse or GP** can provide support.
- **Medical social workers** in maternity hospitals provide support for people experiencing postnatal depression.
- **Parentline** – Offer support for people affected by postnatal distress.
Tel: 1890 92 72 77
Email: info@parentline.ie
Web: www.parentline.ie
- **Postnatal distress support groups**
Your public health nurse, maternity hospital or unit will be able to provide you with details of your nearest group.
- **Aware** – Helping to defeat depression
Tel: 1890 30 33 02
Web: www.aware.ie

