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Dr Christopher talks about: **BIRTH PLANS**

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## Birth Plans

Is a birth plan a good idea? Is it something that GynaecMD encourages?

It is not compulsory to have a birth plan but it is useful if you have particular ideas as to how you would like your deliver to be conducted and especially if you have special requests (eg. no epidurals, no episiotomy if possible, warm tub for pain relief, aromatherapy candles, certain music to be played in your delivery room, husband to cut the cord, intermittent monitoring of the baby, ability to ambulate and not be completely bedbound). It conveys to me what is desired in writing and I try to fulfill my patient's wishes as long as it is not medically dangerous and will not compromise the safety of the delivery. This of course will be discussed point by point before the actual big day so that everyone is clear as to what is expected.

Have you noticed an increasing number of pregnant women writing a birth plan in the lead-up to having a baby?

Yes, more and more of my patients are coming up with birth plans. In most cases, I find that what my patient's have requested for is pretty much what I practice as my standard protocol for delivery anyway. As patients are increasingly becoming more internet savvy and discovering the benefits of birth plans I think this trend will continue to rise.

Do many pregnant women show you a birth plan in advance of their big day? Or are they more likely to bring it to hospital on the day to share their wishes with doctors, nurses or midwives? Which is preferable?

Actually I encourage all my patients to discuss their birth plans way before their delivery so that from a very early stage I already have a clear understanding as to how their delivery is to be conducted. More importantly, it gives me plenty of time to make the necessary arrangements. After discussing the birth plan with my patient and her husband, I will send the birth plan to the hospital that she has booked for her delivery so that the hospital and midwives are all aware of my patient's expectations and anything that the hospital cannot accommodate can be addressed early and alternative arrangements can then be made. For example, I had a German patient who actually did not want any epidural or medical pain relief but elected for a warm bath and aromatherapy for her pain relief. She inadvertently chose a hospital that did not have this facility so when we discussed her birth plan, I immediately rebooked her into one hospital that catered specifically to her needs.



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Can a birth plan be of use for a woman having a Caesarian?

Yes it certainly can be commonly used for my patients who are scheduled for an elective caesarian section.

How long should a birth plan be?

It doesn't really matter how long your birth plan is as long as it is clear and fulfills all your requests. Every pregnancy is a unique experience and so birth plans should be individualized to the mother's needs. Of course the shorter, more succinct and to the point, the better for everyone so as to reduce any confusion.

Are birth plans more frequently used by expat women than Singaporean women?

In my clinic, birth plans are more common for my expat mothers but over the years, an increasingly larger number of Singaporean mothers are coming to me with their birth plans too.

Critics of birth plans say there is no way to plan what happens during birth because it is so unpredictable. Is this your experience, too?

Although it is true that birth can be unpredictable but if the pregnancy is straight forward with no complications then most of the time, I will be able to meet my patient's requests if not fully then to the best of my ability depending on the circumstances. Which boils down to the importance of managing expectations early on in the discussion with my patients regarding their birth plans as to what is possible, what may not be and what is absolutely not possible.

