

The Singapore

# Women's Weekly



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For women who want it all

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**ALL EXPECTANT MUMS** worry about labour and birth. So when they're pregnant, they read lots of books about childbirth, pregnancy and health.

Says Dr Chua Yang, Consultant Obstetrician & Gynaecologist with A Clinic for Women, "The delivery process is the highly anticipated 'climax' of the pregnancy. Most new mothers approach childbirth armed with knowledge from books and magazines, advice from their mums, sisters, relatives and friends, or information from their obstetricians."

But is this information sufficient? Like most anxious mums-to-be, Nadia Junainah devoured just about every book on delivery and childbirth she could find, listened carefully to tips from midwives and even attended prenatal classes. "I felt confident and completely informed, yet when it was time for the birth, I went to the hospital unprepared for delivery," recalls Nadia, 30, mum to a 15-month-old.

What haven't the books and your pals told you about labour and delivery? Here are some facts they may have never thought to mention or may have glossed over – but which you must know:

## **1** Birth plans are not blueprints for the actual delivery

There are so many birth plans – what pain relief you want, how you want baby to be delivered, etc – in books, magazines and on the Net. But every pregnancy is unique, so the birth plan should really be individualised as well. Some babies seem determined to ignore the birth plans their mummies have very carefully drafted. So remember, your birth plan is a wish

# Birth Secrets

You **Must** Know

Mums share what really goes on in the delivery room – you won't read this anywhere else!

CALIN CHAN, 20, shares her birthing experience: "Everyone told me how horrendous labour pain can be so when I started to feel pain during the onset of labour, I was worried I'd never make it to the end. But the excitement of my baby's arrival made me almost forget the pain. Then when I saw my son, Teyes, the labour pain didn't matter. In fact, I don't mind going through it again."



list, not a must-do-must-have checklist. Says Dr Chua Yang, "Have realistic expectations and accept the possibility of deviations from plans as there may be problems and complications. Some mothers actually tell me they want a birthing process like the one their best friend had! While it's important to have a birth plan, it's also important not to be rigid about sticking to the plan and to know your options."

Stephanie Lee, 27, mum to 14-month-old Joshua, says, "I remember telling the doctor I wanted a natural birth with no drugs. But I had an infection and there were complications so my son's birth was induced. Then, my cervix couldn't dilate enough, so I ended up with a caesarean delivery. So, things may not always go as planned."

## 2 Pregnancy books are big on euphemisms!

Dr Caroline Khi, Consultant Obstetrician & Gynaecologist with ACJ Women's Clinic, Thomson Medical Centre, says most pregnancy books don't fully explain the birthing process. "They're full of descriptions on the changes to the body and the baby's development, but don't dwell much on the actual delivery." That's because giving birth is an extraordinary experience personal to each woman.

CAROLINE WIRTH, 28, was in labour for 20 hours before her gynae suggested an emergency C-section. "It wasn't what I had planned but I'd only dilated 2 cm. No one told me I could be awake during an epidural caesarean, with my hubby beside me, and still feel pain during the process.

"The pain was excruciating, but it can't compare to gaining a beautiful life," says the mum of Brandon, 3½ months.



## 3 You may not want hubby around

Unlike what you see in movies, you may not feel like bonding with your husband while in labour. In fact, you may want him out of the room altogether. The father's role is really in giving support.

Says Dr Chua Yang, "Dads are often given the honour to cut the umbilical cord and detach baby from the placenta. It's a special time for the couple."

But Dr Khi adds, "If the father can't bear the sight of the actual delivery, he should wait outside the delivery room and join his wife after the clean-up."

## 4 Every woman reacts differently to labour pains

If you insist on not having an epidural even before you experience contractions, you may be adding more stress to the situation because you've essentially taken away a good pain control option.

Dr Chua Yang advises patients to explore their tolerance level. "Do this during the initial labour pains. Then as the pains intensify, decide if you are starting to get affected badly and need relief. Some women feel distressed or 'fight with' the pain, even involuntarily try to 'push baby out' This can result in early exhaustion or oedema (swelling or puffiness) of the birth canal and baby's scalp, decreasing the ease and chance of a natural birth." **W**

TEXT: JENNIFER DE OYIS; PHOTOGRAPHY: NYEN; MAKE-UP: ERNI LESING; MOLT ON BROWN COLORS