MERCY WEST LAKES

VOLUNTEER BIRTH DOULA PROGRAM
During the amazing time of welcoming your baby, much care and attention is placed on the baby. **Now, it’s your time to be the center of attention.** At Mercy West Lakes, you’ll be offered a volunteer birth doula – a woman who specializes in supporting and comforting you during labor.

Studies have found the presence of a trained birth doula during labor has many benefits, including: shorter labors, less use of epidurals and other pain medications, lower episiotomy rates and a 50 percent reduction in cesarean section rates. Research has also shown better clinical outcomes for both mother and baby (including fewer admissions to neonatal intensive care units, better breastfeeding rates and better family bonding). A doula also provides care for the mother’s partner and other family members, assists hospital staff and greatly increases a mother’s overall satisfaction with her birthing experience.

**Frequently asked questions**

Here are some commonly asked questions about the Mercy West Lakes Volunteer Birth Doula Program.

**How does the Mercy West Lakes Volunteer Birth Doula Program work?**

The program offers volunteer birth doulas that are “on-call” for a 24-hour period each month. Patients who are in active labor and choose to have a birth doula will receive them on a first-come, first-serve basis at no additional cost.

Not knowing demand, we cannot guarantee the services of our volunteer birth doulas. If you know you would like to have a doula present at your delivery, we do allow you to contract with a doula of your choice or we can recommend one for you (this optional service is paid out-of-pocket by the patient).

**What training do the Mercy volunteer birth doulas complete?**

Our volunteer birth doulas are required to complete a two-day Doula and Labor Support Workshop. They must interview with our Mercy Birth Doula
Coordinator and complete the Mercy volunteer application process, which includes comprehensive background checks and health screens.

How do I request a volunteer birth doula?

When you are in active labor and admitted to Mercy West Lakes, let your labor nurse know you are interested in having the on-call volunteer birth doula present. While Mercy wants to provide the best possible birthing experience for you, our birth doulas are volunteers and we cannot guarantee their availability for everyone. After you notify the nurse, she will then determine the birth doula’s availability.

If I want to guarantee a birth doula during my delivery, can Mercy refer one?

Yes. If you are interested in contracting with a doula and paying for their services, Mercy can refer one. Please visit mercydesmoines.org/birthdoula for a list of doulas.

About Doulas

What is a birth doula?

The term doula is a Greek word meaning “to mother the mother.” Doulas are women who are passionate about birth and are dedicated to making the experience as comfortable and memorable as possible. A doula provides continuous labor support during childbirth, working together with the mother and her partner to assist with emotional and physical support.

Is a doula the same thing as a midwife?

No. A doula provides no medical or nursing care. Since she doesn’t have these responsibilities, or other patients to attend to, she can focus her complete attention to being by the mother’s side for the entire length of her labor.

Does a doula replace the support person (such as a husband)?

A doula doesn’t replace anyone – she acts as another member of the birth team and supports everyone in their own role. A doula’s presence helps fathers or partners participate at their own comfort level, showing them how and when to use various comfort techniques, providing information, and in
some cases, looking after them as well. Partners are often grateful to be able to share the “coaching” responsibility with someone more experienced, and can therefore enjoy more of the birth experience.

Does having a doula mean only natural childbirth?
No. It is the mother and her support person who decide on the best choices for their family. Doulas are trained to assist with a medicated or un-medicated birth. If a mother desires to have a medication-free birth experience, a doula can help with alternative pain relief measures.

What techniques are most commonly used by a doula?
A doula is trained in positioning and relaxation techniques such as massage, music, aromatherapy and visualization. The use of the birthing ball is an important component as movement is essential in labor.

How does a doula partner with the medical staff?
A doula is part of the team, providing physical and emotional support. A doula provides non-clinical care for the laboring woman and her partner. Doulas do not perform cervical exams or fetal monitoring. Doulas use safe and gentle measures to comfort the laboring woman. The nurse and doctor monitor the clinical aspects of labor. Doulas do not make decisions for the mother or partners, but will use their birth plan to support the family.